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# THE WAY OF A COUNTRYMAN





Munhead Bone to Beech-Thomas  
Drawn at Press G.H.Q. on the Somme 1916.

This is a Christmas card  
sent to him in 1943  
MB

SIR WILLIAM  
BEACH THOMAS

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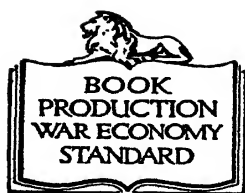
THE WAY OF A  
COUNTRYMAN



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THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE  
CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORIZED  
ECONOMY STANDARDS

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# Apologia



IN events and in action the least exciting part of life is the first part; and in reading lives most of us prefer the writer to plunge into the middle of things (as Horace advises) or, as a less classical author urges, to "cut the cackle and come to the 'osses." It needs a certain modicum of conceit to suppose that the public will be interested in an undistinguished boyhood, though the most humble may feel himself justified in recording his elder experience of great events and famous or notorious persons. Many years ago, I was persuaded to write some account of the places and people and events that had enhanced a special correspondent's life. The book, called *A Traveller in News*, is long since out of print; and when I look back on its record it now seems to me that it omits almost every influence that fundamentally mattered in life. Similarly, in reviewing other people's lives I began to see that after all the best plan may be to obey the advice of Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*, who was a Christ Church don in my time at that Oxford House, and "begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end, then stop." The essays in biography that have most vividly impressed me, in the records of countrymen at any rate, concern early impressions. W. H. Hudson, whom I did not know till he was approaching old age, never wrote anything so good as the tale of his early years in *Far Away and Long Ago*; and Richard Jefferies came nearest to genius in recollections of his boyhood in Wiltshire. Now it happened that I was sent for review an autobiography of Sir Herbert Maxwell, who was a friend of an uncle of mine, what he called a fishing friend, for they had caught salmon in company on Norwegian rivers. Sir Herbert was a great countryman. His *Memories of the Months* charmed a wide circle, and of their sort have seldom been surpassed. It was therefore a disappointment to find scarcely any reference to fish or rivers or other natural objects in his autobiography, which was principally devoted to history and politics. He thought these more important, but the omission of the unimportant spoilt what might have been a very charming tale. The conclusion seemed to be that the countryman, if not the townsman, trails what clouds of glory he can boast from early days when his acuity of ear and eye, and lithe-ness of limb and the rest made of the country a "fairy place." More than this: he can ever after "beget the golden time again" at will by rehearsing and repeating what then he felt, and infiltrating subsequent experience with the old memories. Life throughout its course would be half-bled

of meaning without the background of irresponsible days in a country home. It is not the person experiencing such natural delight who matters, but the meaning of the influence itself. The same may perhaps be said of the sportsman and the player of games. It is the nature of the zest that is of importance.

Of such a sort is my apology for prefacing and mingling an account of what a colleague of mine called *The World of Action* (which covers the ground of some of the earlier book) with a picture of a quiet home in the deep, deep country; and in my life it so happened that the last chapter proved to be not altogether unlike the first. The country once again became all in all; and England a prevailing Paradise.

## CHAPTER ONE



# Home



*And he who gives a child a home  
Builds palaces in Kingdom Come.*

J. MASEFIELD

*True to the kindred points of heaven and home.*

The Lark    WORDSWORTH

MY father was rector of a parish set in the deep, deep country, though it was only some sixty miles from London. The rectory and the church stood on a hillock separated from each other only by a gravelled drive and two enormous sycamore trees. The square and splendid church tower was "bosomed high in tufted trees" in a most English manner and drew your eyes from any part of the gentle surrounding slopes. The little village, of not more than 160 inhabitants, lay below it, out of all proportion to the glory of the church, whether from within or without. It seemed no more than an adjunct to the church, and indeed belonged to it. Anyone in any trouble came automatically to my father, and any woman to my mother. If it should happen that any sort of calamity befell the village everyone came to church, as on the Sunday following the arrest of a labourer for stealing a farmer's purse. We understood the instinct, but could not explain it to anyone unacquainted with our community. Only in the church could any communal sympathy be expressed. The people wanted to say that they needed a certain sanctification after such a soiling of their reputation, for the village was known corporately as a good village, in contrast to one of its neighbours, which was held to be a bad village. Not that the appeals to the Rectory, which stood so near the church, were for the most part spiritual. It was recognised as a completely normal event when the maidservant, after bringing in the Rectory lunch, returned to announce that "Mrs. Jarvis, 'up the gardens,' would like a little game and a custard pudding." She lived in a small old thatched cottage styled "up the garden;" and doubtless the doctor who had recommended such a diet knew where she could get its equivalent. Mrs. Jarvis had obeyed the prevailing instinct and habit without further thought.

The unity of the village was exceptional for an exceptional reason.



My mother, who often blurted out what was in her mind without further consideration, once said to a visitor, who happened to be a strong Congregationalist: "We have an ideal village. There is no public house and no chapel." He asked gently whether she associated the two together, and my poor mother, who was completely free from sectarian prejudice, was overwhelmed. She had been thinking only of village unity. The keeper of the one village shop, who led the responses in the church with immense emphasis, was brewer as well as clerk; but his beer, which was good honest beer, was not consumed on the premises. It may be said that everyone owned everyone else. Old George Smith—that was his real name, for nothing was not English in the village—who was gardener, coachman and stockman at the Rectory, always spoke of the Rector's family as "our children;" and such sense of ownership was general. The village was "our village" in more than Miss Mitford's sense. "Old George" received 16s. a week, plus 2s. that my father insisted on putting into the Post Office each week; and before the old man died he owned a whole hundred pounds.

My father kept at different dates both milch cows and sheep on the glebe; and converted a part into "cow-pastures" for the pick of the labourers. We laughed on occasion at the intellectual deficiencies of Old George, especially in the sphere of mathematics. If the fruit disappeared he spoke with allusive cunning of "two-legged birds," so differentiating our children from the thrushes, which presumably had three or four legs. Indeed the number 2 was his chief trouble. When someone foolishly maintained that the tower of the church was twice as high as a neighbouring yew-tree, he rebuked the exaggeration: "No," he said, "only as high again." Nevertheless, though this advanced number tripped him up, he had great gifts. Many times he was sent off with the pony and trap to bring a number of stores from the nearest shopping centre, which was nine miles away; and since his reading and writing were at fault, he received his instructions only by word of mouth. There was no need even to repeat them. He was letter perfect and was not known to forget or mistake any item. His aural memory had not been spoiled by the artificial arts that are now drilled into unwilling schoolchildren. More than this, he had a genius for managing stock. The cows accepted him as one of themselves and, you might think, told him their troubles. He was their doctor, perceiving at once the approach of any malady, and the cows asked for him with low murmurs when the hour of the deliverance of a calf approached. I can remember no catastrophe in any of the stock. Yet the sheds and apparatus were singularly primitive; and the cows bought at random.

Old George had been an agricultural labourer before he came to the Rectory; and one scene of his earlier activities still remains vivid. Four men set out to mow a great field of wheat with scythes, each implement furnished with a wooden screen to sweep and collect the swathe. That heavy "bean and wheatland" grew crops as heavy as itself, and the wielding of the scythe needed strength as well as skill. Old George was much the lightest of the four; and if he lost distance or lagged at all in their échelon formation, he was unmercifully mocked. His arms were a wonder to the children who watched this great athletic feat, so freckled they were and ruddy with wiry hairs, and as sinewy as the leg of a fowl. From early morning till after sunset the four worked, and Old George, who was the last in the pattern, had not lost more than a yard or two when he finished his last stretch. Much beer was their beverage, and they had as firm a belief in its power to produce energy as in the fat bacon and bread that was their standard lunch. When harvest was over there was not enough flesh left on Old George's frame to produce so much as a drop of sweat. A little later his wife and children were to be found gleaning over the field, collecting the grain in sheaves, little and big like their gatherers, tied tightly; and these sheaves—all but the biggest, which was sent up for harvest decoration—were stacked in the low living-room of the cottage till there was less room for the family in the one corner by the hearth than for the cows in the worst of the sheds. The local mill, now, alas, extinct, threshed and ground each man's contribution separately. Later again the Rectory would receive the gift of a "gleaning loaf." Its curious yellow tint and nutty savour are also living memories.

It was perhaps twenty years later that the old man, who had now a paddock and a cow of his own, while thatching his little hayrick, stabbed his eye with a split hazel and lost it. "I don't know as it hurts much," he said to an enquirer, "but I wish it had been t'other. It was the better one." That was as near to self-pity (that lamentable vice, almost unknown in the true countryman) as ever the old man attained.

One great advantage of living in the complete country, where there are no bought amusements, is that you are never bored. Being out of doors is itself sufficient entertainment when you have the freedom of the garden and the glebe. It is only a question what sort of interest the hour will supply. Home to us was not a fireside (as the French call it), nor even father and mother and brothers and sisters, but included a village, wide grass fields, spinneys dotted among them, a moat (or rather the moat) and a brook, all populous with very familiar denizens, whether two-legged or four-legged or six-legged; and as time went on and incidents accumulated, spinney, pond, field, tree, and the rest were

written over with a quite unforgettable script. Fifty, even sixty, years later an exact and almost visible memory remained of the events that happened or were made to happen by this burrow or that hollow tree or that bank or even in the church tower. It was a wonderful tower from any aspect. Within, a spiral staircase with much worn steps led to two rooms, the higher one the belfry, where four unusually large bells were suspended. Both rooms, as well as a good part of the staircase were always thick with dry sticks deposited over generations of time by the jackdaws, and for the most part left there quite undisturbed by the sexton. He said loud amens on Sundays, and dug graves as narrow as he dared when folk died—and that was work enough for one man.

The jackdaw is a strange bird with a religious kink. The pairs that nested in the tower, where at the right season you could fill a sack with their pale, spotted eggs, never used the old sticks except that they made a necessary foundation or platform, and if they brought a new stick, which could not be carried at the first intention through the narrow chinks, they dropped it outside and flew off to find another. There was usually some good kindling at the foot of the tower. Above the spiral stair a ladder, of a rather crazy description, took you through a trap-door to the top of the tower. The view from there remains to me the perfect picture of an English scene. The country was a pattern, a large-scale coloured map: famous fox-coverts, humble spinneys, lined hedges between the green and brown fields, trees everywhere, here and there a spire pointing out of them like the spears of bulbs in the grass; little mounds and hollows, eloquent of a country fathoms deep in history, for the most part quite unrecorded history. The one exception was the neighbour hamlet of Little Gidding, where the Ferrars spent their saintly days and bound their beautiful books in the days of Charles the First. No other scene so nicely patterned rivalled it, till I flew in an aeroplane over and along the German trenches between Gommecourt and Arras, and the one was as eloquent of deep humanity as the other of inhuman terror.

The small English village is or was beyond comparison as a social unit, in spite of some obvious defects. Years later I met, in the lovely garden of Wadham Collegé, Cecil Rhodes and Lord Kitchener, who had come to Oxford to receive honorary degrees; and the next day I heard from a tutor that Rhodes had amazed the Senior Common Room by a lyrical outburst on the subject of his native village and the thatched cottages grouped physically, spiritually and socially about the historic church. It was not the theme expected of that hard-bitten Empire-builder.

It has often been argued, by perhaps too partial witnesses, that the sons of country parsons do better on the average than the sons of other professional persons. Whether it is so I dare not affirm, but feel quite sure that they get a flying start on the road to the higher happiness. I was asked in later years by two friends of Oxford days—the Bishop of Liverpool and a Canon of Westminster—to write an “Affirmation” of my faith in a country life as an answer to the urbanisation of the mind, which was one of the dangers of our present civilisation; and in this series, *The Happy Village* appeared. Perhaps the summing-up, though it savours a little of the pamphleteer, may be quoted as in some sort a countryman’s creed.

“Modern man lives in a hurly-burly of events, opening his eyes each morning, with the puzzled wonder of a child, to new discoveries and inventions. Emotionally and intellectually he lives from hand to mouth. Secondary and artificial things make strange noises in his ears. He is himself like a motor at rest before the cogs are engaged, is ready for progress, but as yet makes none. The engine of his elaborate and mechanical civilisation moves with gusto, but to no end. A busy but aimless generation has learnt to control all forces but the tumult of its own soul. This confusion in heart and brain—this malaise—is loudest in the towns, but the rumblings of the storm-centre spread all over the country. The ‘ribbon development’ of villas and bungalows and shacks and garages, deplored by the thoughtful and energetic ‘Preservers of Rural England,’ that extend beyond the villages and cloak the open country from the road, may be taken as sign or symbol of the contagion of our urbanised civilisation. It is my fear that we may become a secondary and artificial people, ruined by the horrid sequels of the industrial revolution, which damaged souls even more than bodies, if and supposing that the present urbanisation continues. But the fear is no more than the negative counterpart of the active faith that we may restore our sense of eternal truths and elemental verities by the ‘conservation of national resources,’ not in the material sense emphasised by Theodore Roosevelt in America, but by conserving the spiritual home of all humanity, the woods and rivers, the hills and valleys, the trees and bushes, the open expanses of land and sky, by preserving the sources of the true observation of living things, in their life and in their death. But this faith has a reservation. If the crowds and tumult of towns may ruin spiritual health, so may loneliness. The Anchorite is often mad, and the solitary a burden to himself. So it comes about that the village is the ideal place for the nursery of man. The houses that cluster below the church tower are more than pretty and picturesque, they stand for a unit of civilised life beyond compare.

The aim of those who strive to regenerate humanity should be to help the village ideal to conquer the town ideal."

It is perhaps not quite truthful to extol our country life as in any way sentimentally idealistic. We should have enjoyed life much less if it had not been for ponies, foxes, rabbits and birds. My father had especial delight in three subjects: people, ponies and a few modern writers, Tennyson and George Eliot above others perhaps, and Townsend and Hutton of the *Spectator*. We always had ponies and were sternly taught to jump them over the dykes and bushes on the wide glebe and neighbouring fields; and they earned their dividends. My brother, who was a born jockey, was coached for the Indian Civil Service, but was ill when the examination was held. Soon afterwards, being determined on a free life with sport and horses in it, he went out to India to seek a place in the Indian Police, a fine service that at that date could be entered on the spot by personal selection. He was appointed almost at once, thanks, he always believed, to a letter from the M.F.H. of the Fitzwilliam foxhounds, saying that he was the best boy rider in the Hunt. His exceptional faculty for languages, whether live or dead, was of much smaller account. He rose rapidly in the service, shot every dangerous animal that was to be shot, and was perhaps the better officer for playing much polo and winning steeplechases. He gloried in the Indian life, though he sent home some verses about "the fair false land of sunshine that is not home to me."

The Shires, as they proudly call themselves, and the parts of Middle England particularly associated with hunting, would not be called beautiful by the traveller. They undulate gently, their streams are small and slow, the woods are well scattered but too little for the glories of the forest, and the soil is heavy, often a singularly stubborn and adhesive clay. Yet the Midlands nurse the most English qualities of a lovely island. Their freedom is not easily granted. You must know one little piece by heart before the full secret of the charm is discovered. Then and only then the memory accompanies you, like a spiritual belief, wherever you may be. As I once wrote, "You cannot know England unless you walk, since its distinction is intimacy and diminutive variety, and unless you have lived in its villages, for its note of humanity. The liveliest things are like nests in hedgerows, just screened by tiny leaves, enfolding delicate eggs, sung over by music not the less sweet for being outside the known laws of melody."

When spring came, my brother and I would double every hedgerow in the neighbourhood and comb out the spinneys and climb the trees to search out every nest of every bird. To help the climbing my father had designed a pair of climbing irons, duly wrought by the village

blacksmith to his specification; and so the high nests of crows or hawks came within our scope as well as the little hidden hedgerow nests or the moorhen's by the brook and the moat. We were humane enough (though boys perhaps are nearly always in some degree cruel) to take only one egg from any bird that was not predatory, and I hardly remember a bird deserting. To know the colour of every species of egg, to know the architecture of every nest and its likely site is not doubtless a high form of educative science, but it can give the same sort of pleasure that any artist sucks out of form and colour and the technique of their management. Small birds' nests are lovely things. A generation or more after boyhood I found and watched daily a blackcap's most slender nest in a hedge beside a lane in France during the 1914-18 war. Just as the young were hatching a practising tank, of the first clumsy type, crushed the protecting bush and hidden nest to pulp; and the little unimportant accident remains with me as a symbol of the Juggernaut of War, more real and vivid in the memory than most of its salient horrors. The birds of sweetest song make the slightest nests, and lay the eggs that are tenderest to the touch—the nettle-creeper, the blackcap and the nightingale.

None of my brothers or sisters perhaps would dare to confess how large a place is taken in the annals of their memory by just one pair of walnut trees, planted some hundreds of years earlier in the glebe; but was not W. H. Hudson driven to a confession of tree worship by some such memory? The trees seemed at least as old as the thirteenth-century church. One had, and has, a wide kennel-like opening at the bottom of the trunk, and the other, which was the finer tree, thrust out one horizontal bough that was hollow throughout. In this the barn owls, those useful and adorable birds, nested almost every year. Once, merely for wantonness, we inserted a hen's egg in the nest and revisited it by a most fortunate calculation on the very day that the chick was hatched. It was transferred to a warm basket by the kitchen fire and lived to be an adequate egg-layer. The country is full of walnut trees, that, like the boy boxer in *Great Expectations*, make a great appearance, but bear little nuts with thin shells. They were multiplied about 120 years ago by some dishonest or ignorant nurseryman. Happily these two antique giants dated from good old days. Boys, squirrels—brown squirrels, which abounded then and there—and rooks descended upon the fruit at the due season or in anticipation of it. The trees stay put in the memory and come to the surface, like lines of familiar verse, at any odd moment, as though they had a rhyme and rhythm of their own. Visiting them years afterwards (to see whether the quotation agreed with the original), a blow or two against the hollows with a stick drove out a barn-owl from one and a

jackdaw from the other. When, as expected, the owl flew away in a wayward ghostlike patrol no further than the nearest oak tree, the past was wholly restored and all was well! Something very like a prayer was answered. The true country seldom lets you down. Those walnuts were to us as the OMBU to W. H. Hudson.

## CHAPTER TWO



### A Sacred Animal



*Hush! a brown form through the gorse stems is stealing.  
Off to the vale with a wave of the brush.*

Ivinghoe Hill    GEORGE ROBINS

*Louder, louder chant the lay,  
Waken, lords and ladies gay!  
Tell them youth and mirth and glee  
Run a course as well as we.*

Hunting Song    SIR WALTER SCOTT

FOUR species of animal provided the bulk of our amusements, indeed filled an absurdly large portion of life: ponies, dogs, rabbits and foxes. The ample glebe surrounded by spinneys composed a young sportsman's paradise. My father, who loved every type of horse—and was lamed in his old age by breaking in a young thoroughbred—went off on one memorable occasion to Bampton Fair and returned with a truckload of wild Exmoor ponies, of which the extra seven or eight beyond our own needs were sold at a pound or so a head to neighbouring farmers. The bushed ditches of the glebe gave ideal steeplechase jumps for the beginner. Rabbits abounded in every spinney and hedgerow; and their number, it may be, brought the large company of foxes, which were acknowledged to be the master animal of the district; and it was still endowed with an almost sacred character. We could scarcely imagine anyone being so wicked as to shoot a fox or to snare it on purpose.

When autumn came the hunt always let us know (and we were specially favoured in this regard) when and where the next cubbing meet would take place. The very early hours in the morning set the flourish on this ever popular form of sport. Our ponies knew every inch of every neighbouring field and ride, and we were freely used as observers. It is the live fox, not the dead animal, that I remember; and the place where they had their being, the coloured bushes dripping with dew, the broad mossy corridors pock-marked with hooves, the successive sounds that broke the silence: first the rush of a pigeon's wings, then the scream of the jays, then perhaps the loud warning stroke of a rabbit's



hind legs; and as the tumult of the hounds grew nearer a fox might break through the bushes almost at your pony's feet, skip lightly aside, watchful and unafraid, and disappear on the other side of the ride, but not too quickly to leave you with possession of the valuable information whether he was cub or parent, dog or vixen. There are other less pleasant memories. To be "blooded"—though it meant the gift of the brush—that is, to be anointed on the cheek with the cub's blood, was distasteful, almost repulsive, even to the boy who was meant to be proud of the honour. Sometimes the famous little fox-terrier from the Rectory would be sent for and came back to the side of the earth looking eagerly out of the Whip's pocket, with a brightness of eye which suggested his foreknowledge of the test in front of him. Once, after a long pause within a circle of watching hounds, his rump appeared inch by painful inch in the mouth of the earth till at last the fox that he was tugging at showed a patch of ruddy hair; and the hounds poured into the pit made by the diggers who had found the job too tough. How we trembled for the dog's life, but he appeared presently out of the rabble, even then reluctant to leave the prey to those great bullies that could not have succeeded without him. He lived to father four puppies in the year of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, and they were duly named Jub and Billy, Vic. and Tory, as village children of a later date were christened Zeppelina.

The fox, an animal of prevailing significance in the district, which was the core of the Fitzwilliam Hunt, made strange contact with the two walnut trees at a later date. The poultry at the Rectory had been ravaged, and an appeal was made to the Hunt, which instantly responded. The neighbouring spinneys and even hedgerows were all drawn blank and—to the Rector's shame—the baffled hunt were on the point of withdrawing, when a local labourer caught a glimpse of a bright eye and a red-white muzzle protruding from the long hollow bough, once sacred to the barn owls. The fox was poked out, dodged the pack, ran through the Rectory garden, took a moment's sanctuary in the church porch, fled from there to the village school, and was killed in a small privy.

We hunted on foot as well as on ponies, and in that way saw more of the animal, though less of the sport than others. One walk stands out. My father and I posted ourselves at a corner of the locally famous covert, Gidding Gorse, where we knew almost for certain that the fox would break, but even so we were a little startled when he leapt out of the ditch within a foot or two of where we stood. The leading hounds were close behind, and at our halloo the whole field were in a moment streaming

away across the grass slope and were soon clean out of sight behind the Ferrars' chapel, and utter peacefulness was left behind. "It is an evanescent sport," said my father, and being young I had to ask the meaning of the word.

At a field's breadth behind us stood the small historic church of Little Gidding, which we visited a hundred times, more often perhaps than we should have, because it had just been made more famous by J. H. Shorthouse. In his beautiful book, *John Inglesant*, the most human passage concerns the meeting of John Inglesant and Mary Collett in the days of Charles I. You tread on her tomb as you walk to the west door of the little chapel, and we always read the inscription, less for the record than to mark the three different spellings of her name, shortened or drawn out to suit the spacing of the line, as was done by folk who cared more for art than for accuracy. The place is worth a pilgrimage for many reasons: for its quietude and beauty, for the remembrance of Mary Collett and the Ferrars and their holy lives, for the association with poets, especially Cowley, and with kings. Quite lately it has given the title to a book of alleged verse by T. S. Eliot. Within is an eagle lectern recovered, a few years before we saw the bolting fox, from a duck pond beside the church. It was unhurt except for the loss of its jewelled claws, abstracted by the Cromwellians who had pitched it into the water.

In the open wood that hides and almost encloses the church, double daffodils grow wild. They were seldom seen in full glory owing to the excessive zeal of a labourer's wife, who was wont to gather them in bud, put them in water in a tin bath and produce them with infinite pride and in full flower when the hour came for putting Easter decorations in the church. For the same purpose we and others would make an expedition to the nearest fox covert to collect tree-like mosses as a setting for the flowers. The church would be full that day to see the decorations, to listen to the simple, almost perfect English of my father's short sermons, and less consciously to feel the truth of the Resurrection, as expressed by primrose, daffodil and birds' song, as well as in the Book.

Walking down to the brook from Little Gidding Hill you were more definitely aware than even in the glebe below the Rectory of the presence of a departed civilisation. That charming man and great historian, Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, once bore testimony to the largeness of the population in the days of Elizabeth in a favourite parish in the Penn country. He wrote, "The earliest English atlas—that of Saxton—shows how thickly populated was our countryside in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Our

smallest villages have pedigrees that put the oldest families to shame. So ancient are some of our rustic settlements that they seem to have grown with the landscape and to have become an indistinguishable part of surrounding nature. Indeed, it is difficult to conjure up this picture of English country without thinking at the same time of our old villages and of the cottage gardens with their—

gold-dusted snapdragon,  
Sweet William with its homely cottage smell  
And stocks in fragrant blow."

He would have been yet more forcibly struck at Little Gidding. In a completely empty land, out of sight of the now tiny hamlet, are a succession of fishponds, for the most part dry, and two splendid avenues leading from nowhere to nowhere. As in the glebe humps in the grass alone tell the place of long since vanished houses. It is a strange thought in this populous land of England that the depopulation has been going on for several hundred years, to be rapidly accelerated in this generation. Not a village thereabouts but is smaller, some by 80 per cent, than when Victoria ended her reign. All this loss—in Bucks, in Huntingdon, in Hereford, and other country counties—has coincided with the trebling of the total population. The whole of the local residents could not make a full congregation for the great and lovely church where the jackdaws piled their sticks. The birds almost claimed the church. The service was interrupted by the chatter of daws, who found their way even under the chancel roof. My father used to quote from Thomas Hood—a poet most of us do not enough admire—

The daw's not reckoned a religious bird  
Because he keeps a-cawing from a steeple

Other birds, too, seemed to have a special liking for the church. Your attention strayed perpetually in springtime to the ringing songs of blackbird and thrush and chaffinch from boughs that almost touched the roof. The churchyard was a great place for birdsnesting. It was there that as a boy I found my first nightingale's nest among a sheaf of elm suckers.

In those early days, when there were no motor-cars, not even bicycles, we journeyed to the nearest town, nine miles away, by pony, whose feet churned up inches of white dust. The clouds were such that hedgerows and the rim of flanking fields were visibly whitened. The taste of it is still in my mouth dating from a foolish boyish adventure. My father

had just started on this long journey to the town, when we found a dead fox in the kex of a spinney. It carried on its leg a heavy-toothed steel trap. The death of a fox by such foul means was an earthshaking event, not to be dealt with by youth, so I set off running down the road with the impossible ambition of catching up the pony. Happily my father, as his friendly habit was on such occasions, had stopped about a mile away to talk to a hedgecutter, and saw the small boy, covered with dust and in his panting zeal swallowing much of it, toiling behind in vain, like Black Auster; and so the terrible news was imparted. My father returned to see the corpse. The fox had fallen into the trap in the sexton's pigsty, climbed the wall in his manacled state, and had died after reaching the refuge of the spinney.

It was in the same spinney that the cub-hunters, sending for a draining spade to the long, low whitewashed farmhouse some three hundred yards away, dug out a cub that had been bred in a large warren converted into an earth. As the labourer, glad to leave his proper job for this more exciting task, was digging away, the cub tried to bolt, but instead of allowing the escape, the man thrust his narrow draining spade in front of the opening. The cub quite undismayed worked its head round the spade and bit the metal blade with fury. Nearly all vermin (and we have the highest authority for calling the fox a "varmint") are dauntless and unafraid, though now and again checked by surprising adversaries. One summer day, just beyond the village, a turkey cock, with hen and chicks in attendance, had strayed across the field under inspection of an old vixen. As they returned to their base she advanced to the attack, but the turkey cock, displaying all his panoply of angry feathers, faced round and challenged the fox, covering the retreat of hen and chicks. The manoeuvre, repeated over and over again, was watched across the whole breadth of the field. Whenever the enemy drew too near, the turkey cock expanded his wrath, and the vixen, though she continued to pursue, dared not face so formidable a display. Such once again was the proved power of a righteous cause: the turkey's "strength was as the strength of ten." Most boys brought up in real country places are in some sort little Hiawathas:

Then the little Hiawatha,  
Learned of every bird its language,  
Learned their names and all their secrets,  
How they built their nests in Summer,  
Where they hid themselves in Winter,  
Talked with them whene'er he met them,  
Called them "Hiawatha's Chickens."

Of all beasts he learned the language,  
 Learned their names and all their secrets,  
 How the beavers built their lodges,  
 Where the squirrels hid their acorns,  
 How the reindeer ran so swiftly,  
 Why the rabbit was so timid,  
 Talked with them whene'er he met them,  
 Called them "Hiawatha's Brothers."

Hiawatha was a great friend of ours, perhaps because my father held, as he used to say, that "Longfellow gives an excellent introduction to poetry;" and I still find the criticism good and sound. How much of Hiawatha we could have implemented in our tamer experience. And how many score of little memories survive in precise and living pictures: as of the hedgehog deep in winter sleep within a moss-covered snag where he had collected on his spines dry oak-leaves from the one big oak in the spinney. Not twenty yards away a hibernating bat was discovered in a pollard willow by the brook's edge when one of us was digging out the soft half-decayed wood of his winter couch. Such pictures belong to all seasons of the year. They can be evoked and float past in procession or cavalcade when you will and jump in front of the eyes at the provocation of any like incident. Birds and beasts of many sorts, even snakes and toads and eels and other fish are in the list, with some few flowers, but they were never, until much later in life, a rival to the animals. Later again, Wordsworth in the *Prelude* and Spenser in the *Faerie Queen* drove out Longfellow, but told much the same tale. Wordsworth perhaps likened himself to Spenser's favourite knight, Tristram.

Ne is there hawk which mantleth on perch,  
 Whether high towering or accosting low,  
 But I the measure of her flight doe search  
 And all her pray and all her diet know:  
 Such be our joyes which in our forrests grow.

Such were our joys. Even the recorders of births, deaths and marriages could not forebear to insert an occasional curiosity of natural history in the parish registers. An instance that particularly pleased us concerned a great flood of a hundred years ago when "a salmon a yard and an inch long was found in farmer Newton's meadow." We had noosed pike in the brook and even shot them, but could boast no parallel to the stranded salmon. How much, we wondered, did it weigh? Yet every yard of the brook had its associations, had yielded its excitements. Here

the two terriers had fallen into the flood with a flat-headed wild cat which they held under till it sank, and the smaller dog, rather severely wounded, for a good while refused to leave the spot, but stood staring at the stream expecting the victim to reappear. Here a retriever had been lost for a day because he dared not cross a rickety, broken trestle bridge known as the Bridge Perilous. Here a tribe of baby moorhen, disturbed by the dogs, had vainly tried to dive, but instead swam across the stream with submerged heads and fluffy bodies moving like bubbles across the surface. Every yard of that brook has its legend, written in ineradicable ink on the fond and foolish memory. The brook was an "acre rich indeed," of as much concern to us as Westminster Abbey to Beaumont and Fletcher; and the pictures belong to all seasons. Winter was as rich as spring.

## CHAPTER THREE



# Darwin's School



*When we have matched our rackets to these balls—*

Henry V SHAKESPEARE

*Sabrina fair,*

*Listen where thou art sitting*

*Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave:—*

Comus MILTON

ONE summer afternoon, when I was nine years old or so, my father came home in some excitement and was indeed in possession of a secret that was more revolutionary than he imagined, or perhaps anyone can now appreciate. He had been calling at Conington Castle, a beautiful castellated country house on the borders of the Fens. It was the home of Mr. John Heathcote, whose name remains famous in the annals of English games. He had been champion of tennis, of court tennis, over a period of some twenty years; and as such he had been introduced to a brand-new game, that was to be called lawn-tennis, though it derived probably from Badminton, not from the *jeu de paume*. My father was a born pioneer (incidentally he bought one of the first cream separators seen or heard of in the neighbourhood) and at once set on foot the laying of a tennis court in the orchard. So began what I must call the tyranny of games. The shape of the first court was eccentric. It narrowed at the waist and was widest at the base line. The posts were in two parts, weakly socketed together, and they were held upright by guy ropes. In one of the early games a stout and inexperienced neighbouring parson shattered one to pieces and nearly destroyed himself. The net was four feet high in the middle. The racquets, of course, bulged at one side like the real tennis racquet and at first a good deal of fancy work was expended on the handles. I have a keen remembrance of the shape and structure of many of those early racquets, but the most distinctive and long-lived was my father's, which was cork-handled and weighed eighteen ounces, thanks to a solid lump of lead inserted in the base. While the rest of us followed Mr. Heathcote, who hit the ball with all the cut he could command, and that was a very great deal, my father, on the other hand, was more modern, for he took the ball high on the bounce with a stiff forearm and

a flat racquet, very much in the manner of later champions. The stroke pulverised all the neighbouring clergymen, who began to take up the new game with zeal. One of them protested seriously against our type of play. He maintained that the enjoyment of the game consisted in keeping the rally going as long as possible and that therefore hard, low hitting was against its spirit. You wouldn't dream, he would argue, of doing this sort of thing in battledore and shuttlecock. Absurd though such facts are, the game made a marvellous difference to life. I played with great zest from the age of ten onwards; and our household was big enough to ensure a four. To our own family of five children were added the children of a friend of my father's who lived in India; and both boys and girls had something of a genius for ball games. But this was a little later. By that time the uncovered balls were clothed in flannel and the court was straightened and the net lowered. We no longer whitened the lines by rubbing with a dry lump of chalk and no longer designed our own posts. The covering of the balls was an invention of Mr. and Mrs. Heathcote. He was used to the solid, heavy ball of the court game. His steely wrist found the bare rubber balls absurdly light and smooth, and he put the query to his wife: could she clothe them in some cloth or other? Being a MacLeod of MacLeod she set to work with due determination, and so came into being those two oddly-shaped pieces of stuff that alone will enclose a sphere without a crumpling of the outer coat. It proved a better device than Mercator's projection. The first ball covered by Mrs. Heathcote remains a family heirloom and is honoured with a glass case in the study of John Heathcote's heir in Conington Castle.

That house has always stood for me in the light of a doorway to the Fens, a piece of England of which most English people are altogether ignorant. The best record that I know of it was written—at first for private circulation—by Mr. John Heathcote's father, who sketched some of the more characteristic scenes, such as the reed-cutting harvest; and you may see on the reproductions how the frost froze his water colours while he painted. The English fens, most glorious in harvest time, for no soil is richer, become another Holland in frost. On one of the longer frosts of my memory a party of us put on our skates at Holme station, close to Conington, stepped on to an unremarkable ditch within a few yards and found ourselves in a new land. All day we skated, covering perhaps thirty miles, along dykes broad and narrow, each called after the exact breadth, the 16 foot and the 24 foot, and so on, till we reached the old Nene, the unappreciated river valley where flourished the monasteries, Crowland Abbey and the rest, where our present English language was hatched. So, skating between the high banks, seeing little beyond



successive windmills, we put up duck and heron; and could imagine the wealth of natural history that helped the monks to supply their larder. How the record of one of them makes the mouth water!

"When were there in the world such eels and eel-pouts as were taken in the Ouse and Cam, close under the abbey at Ely (3,000 eels, by ancient compact, do the monks of Ramsey pay every Lent to the monks of Peterborough, for leave to quarry stone in a quarry appertaining to Peterborough Abbey; but the House of Ely might have paid 10 times 3,000 eels, and not have missed them, so plenty were they, and eke so good. The streams, too, abounded with pike, and the meres and stagnant waters swarmed with tench and carp. Nor is there less plenty of wild fowl, and for a single halfpenny men can have enough for a full meal. Nor was there a lack of fish that came up the river to spawn. Of wild boars of the forest in the Fen the head only was served up. The wild buck was less abundant in the fenny country. It was also facile to snare the crane, the heron, the wild-duck, teal and the eccentric and most savoury snipe; the swallow-kite, the swarth raven, the hoary vulture, the swift eagle; the greedy goshawk, and that grey beast, the wolf of the weald."

A number of animals in this list are seen no more, yet changed circumstances have not altogether exiled the wild life. Walking through rich potato fields, which have succeeded the true fenland of the days before the draining of Whittlesea Mere, you may still flush scores of snipe, in autumn if not in winter, and the dykes abound in eels and coarse fish. But of the days of Hereward, the Wake, "all except the sun is set." To-day as always the sunsets over those wide and misty flats take on a splendour of colour scarcely known in less happier lands. The plain is so flat and so wide that you can still observe with your eyes the fact of our world's curvature, if you are patient enough to watch a vessel on the long canal. Reclamation still goes on; and still brings in dividends to the cultivators. It was not long ago that an old labourer, noticing a patch of marshy ground near Wisbech, said to himself, "What salery that would grow!" He was given the land for a token payment, and within a few years it was rented at £4 an acre: the celery grower had made a small fortune. Nowhere in England do so many labourers achieve wealth, in some cases very great wealth, as in the flat lands inland of the Wash.

Perhaps the best-known place in the fens is Lingay, where the skating championship is held; and this is not less famous for its sunsets. You see the rich colours from behind the pollard willows which look like gargoyles cut into fantastic shapes of men and animals in caricature. The fenmen themselves, skating in companies along the dykes, keeping in a

straight line, that the leader may take the air resistance and ranging so close to one another that they must perforce strike in time, have the appearance of some primeval centipede. They bend low and swing their arms in unison, moving smoothly as a gaggle of geese flying in formation.

All this is a long way off lawn tennis as a revolutionary game. It may be that the revolution was not wholly to the good. It introduced the game era, and what an inordinate amount of time, energy and interest many of us have spent on games, to the neglect of what are called better things! Before the arrival of lawn tennis popular games were very few. My mother, who came of a very athletic family, never, I think, played any game at all, except croquet and a little archery. Her daughters were good and vigorous lawn tennis and hockey players from the ages of nine or ten. Lawn tennis had almost as good a claim as that made by Arthur Balfour on behalf of the bicycle, which he said was the chief engine in the emancipation of woman. The two almost synchronised and a good many years later than the first appearance of the women's cycle, an old Berkshire farm labourer said to me: "A lady gives up being a lady when she gets on one of them things."

It sometimes seems to me as I look back on wide periods of earlier activities that life at a later date would have been pleasanter, as well as more fruitful, without its amusements. To achieve happiness by a succession of pleasures is like trying to keep up a light all night by striking successive matches. However that may be, the unbroken happiness of the country home in very early days was due in part to the entire absence of at any rate formal amusements. There was no thirst for the cinema; because there was no cinema.

What a number of "necessities of life" we did without! We had no bicycles, of course, no motor cars, no telephone, no wireless, no gramophone, no preserved fruit—except some repulsive dried apples—no tomatoes, no bananas, no keyless watches, and few games. The farmers had no mechanical reapers or ploughs and no one in the parish had any more elaborate light than candles and oil lamps. The first coming of the circular wick was quite an event.

As regards games, it must be confessed that a certain proficiency can be immensely useful even to the promotion of a serious career; much more towards vivid companionship with contemporaries. For myself, I owed as much to athletics as my elder brother to his skill in horsemanship. Even at the age of thirteen, when I first left home for school, the influence of athletics struck me with conscious astonishment. My father delighted in teaching and did not believe in an early exile from home, especially such a home as ours; and for this reason, as well as for economy, he did

not send me to a preparatory school. Shrewsbury, which, just for my first term, was still situated in the town, seemed a very terrifying place to a very green small boy; and indeed it was rough enough in both equipment and manners, though a marvellous nursery of scholarship.

The whole atmosphere changed instantly when the migration was made, after my first term, across the bend of the Severn. Parties of us were mobilised to help in levelling the glorious plateau on the top of the steep hill above the river. We were known as "Gilkes's navvies," and proud of the title, partly because we idolised the master after whom we were nicknamed. The beginning of the Easter term was hard to bear. I felt as if living in the midst of savage enemies who might at any moment decide to scalp you. But it was the term when the school sports were held. Home life had been a continuous training, what with its ponies, its jumping poles and its open-air activities of any and every sort. I won all the four events for which my more precocious brother bade me enter; one of them was a handicap half-mile open to the whole school; and when it was over a very large, spotty-faced elder of the bullying type came up to me and explained in detail how he would have won if he had not spiked himself. It had greatly hurt his pride that I had repassed him at the post. The recollection of my astonishment at this new attitude in a large and terrible person remains extremely vivid. Things had changed indeed; and from that hour life at school became uniformly pleasant.

Running was itself a pleasure. We had an elaborate system of cross-country runs modelled on a hunt, with a huntsman, whips, "gentlemen" and hounds. Some of the runs covered ten or twelve miles and made us familiar with the features of a part of that most splendid country. The Shropshire and Shropshire lad of our acquaintance had little in common with A. E. Housman's. The home training was justified. Both my brother and I became huntsman, were elevated to the glory of a red vest and stockings and a black velvet cap ornamented with a golden whip! And we won between us every event in the school sports, for he excelled in the short and I—at that period—in the long events.

Experience at Christ Church, Oxford, where I went with a school exhibition, was almost a repetition of the school experience. Even a tutor, who was perhaps the least athletic man I have ever met, made a long and laborious inquest into the performances of his more athletic pupils in the schools; and came to the conclusion that their intellectual achievements were much above the average, but that they never reached the very highest pitch. The University prizes went to those who had not suffered the dominance of physical competition. My own experience was that intellectual work after hard physical work was almost useless, not

because of conscious weariness or even disinclination, but what was done then was forgotten almost at once. I had several curious and disturbing mental experiences of this sort, especially regarding a philosophic essay written at night after a particularly hard bout of exercise. I had to read it aloud to a tutor the next day and could not bring myself to believe that I had ever seen the sentences before. The essay itself was not worse than such essays usually are, but recollection of its composition had completely faded. I once asked one of my tutors, Mr. Walter Hobhouse, who was afterwards one of my editors, whether I might stay up for a few days of the Easter vacation in order to train for the inter-university sports. His answer first revealed to me the wit and humour that underlay his rather gloomy demeanour. He said, "Yes; but remember that he who runs may read." Yes: he may read, but can he remember? The greater output of energy seemed to drown the lesser.

An endeavour was made, in conjunction with a very able Oxford doctor, to determine the effect of hard physical energy on longevity. The careers of athletes, especially of Oxford and Cambridge rowing blues, were sought out; and the conclusion was very much the same as my tutor's. The rowers exceeded the average term, but did not reach abnormal ages.

One more example of the use of athletics in after careers. When, some six years after leaving Oxford, I went up to London to plunge into journalism, my first step was to take a letter of introduction to the Editor of the *Sporting and Dramatic News*, a lively illustrated weekly that ultimately perished. He told me at once that no work was going, but that he could put my name down—the most popular and devastating idiom of refusal. However, he begged me to stay to tea and asked questions about Oxford. The moment he heard I had been President of athletics in that seat of learning his attitude changed with ludicrous suddenness. "Let me see," he said, "to-day is Monday. Could you let me have a column by Wednesday morning!" It soon became quite difficult to avoid the role of a sporting reporter; but in spite of the use, and tyranny of games, and, let me confess, their intense interest, from which throughout life no escape is possible, they were not the subjects about which I wished to write. We had to wait till Mr. Bernard Darwin began to describe the felicities of golf in *The Times*, for the final proof that games could be the congenial material of literature.

Mr. Bernard Darwin on the green is in apostolic succession to Sarah Battle on whist. Among his other works he produced an anthology called *The Game's Afoot* and asked me whether I could find any thrilling description of a race. The only reference that I could give was an account

of school sports in *Boys and Masters*, written by Mr. A. H. Gilkes. He was not a great author, but stands out in my memory and affections as the greatest man I have known. He made life at Shrewsbury an abiding influence for a host of Salopians. When at last he thought of leaving Shrewsbury and entered the lists for the head mastership of Dulwich, two of his backers, without collusion, said the same thing: "You will take him if you see him." He was six feet five inches or more in height and supremely handsome, carrying about with him an aura of moral influence irresistible by the young, though he was in general much less impressive in the class-room than outside it. How well I remember being led by him into an empty class-room as I came back from the cricket nets, bat in hand. In that "decent obscurity" he demonstrated to me the exact technique of playing a short ball off the legs, and by way of giving a moral basis to the instruction he explained that it was our duty to improve the true art of cricket in the school with the hope that we should thus exert one little bit of influence in improving cricket the world over. If that is not the higher morality, what is?

He seemed to us a sort of Zeus, a Jupiter; but in spite of his overwhelming dignity he was not without a sort of naughty Puckishness. Some boys and older people he could not resist teasing, and was known to play practical jokes even on the head master, who had a stimulating effect on this side of his nature. His dislike of ceremonial convention was acute. Years after, I met him one day on the cricket ground at Dulwich College on his way to an annual function at the Dulwich Gallery, where he was to meet the President of the Royal Academy. He stopped me and, looking very gloomy, said, "I do hate it. I want to say to him: 'What a fool you are'; and he wants to say to me: 'What a fool you are', and we can't, we can't," and he walked slowly away, nodding his great, handsome head in despair.

What a contrast he and his head master were! The Rev. H. W. Moss, one of the finest classical scholars of his day, had never played a game, had perhaps never been young. Stories about the inadequacy of his knowledge were numerous. When he asked one day how the cricket match was going and was told that four wickets were down, he replied with gusto, "What a fast ball it must have been!" He was reported to have ordered the felling of some trees because he did not like the notes of the corn-crakes, which were surprisingly numerous by the river. Yet he too had his gift of humour, appearing now and again even in his sermons or in his jobations; and his phrases were carefully preserved by his pupils. There are few Salopians of that date who do not remember his sermon on the reading of foolish periodicals, one class of which he

described as "silly scrappits of worthless wit and patchwork pieces of indigestible information." Some fifty years later I met one of his sixth form pupils whom I had not seen in the interval; and at once, almost automatically, instinctively, ejaculated to this now reverend Canon, "Ouph"—which was an accepted preface to all the head master's more emphatic utterances—"Ouph, B—— your brain is a chaotic turmoil of heterogeneous inconsistency."

To such a man—until he married late in life and wore carpet slippers—the classics were all in all. We were taught no science. The mathematical teaching was the last word in inefficiency. Modern languages were restricted to one abbreviated hour a week before breakfast, and that was dropped when you entered the sixth form. English history, past or present, and indeed English literature, were held of no account. Even in Latin and Greek the language was studied with the minimum of emphasis on the beauty and value of the subject matter. Every sort of argument may be invoked against so narrow a view of education; and yet, and yet even among the less capable scholars, of whose membership I am not perhaps untypical, the part of education that has lasted on and grown more precious with age is delight in classical literature. My own knowledge of Latin and liking for it is much greater to-day than when I left school or Oxford. Lately, when lying still and often in the dark in a nursing home, the time passed very quickly and agreeably in the translating of what Shakespearean sonnets I could remember by heart into Latin elegiacs. The ghost of the head master whom we ridiculed and did not greatly respect would rejoice at such belated fruitage of his classical upbringing. The pastime doubtless was vain, and the verses bad; but the pleasure was there and the absorption.

Throughout my days at Shrewsbury scholarship was admired in all parts of the school, as it never was in later days. Good sixth form compositions were marked with the figure 20. If they were very good a tail was added to the 0; if very, very good the tail was crossed. To be accorded a cross was popularly regarded as an honour so great that it was comparable, say, with the making of fifty runs. Such general respect for learning did not, I think, survive in the same force into the days when the education was made wider and more general; and a real man of science incorporated in the staff. The first science master to be appointed could not keep order, and with hard work had attained to a fourth in the schools; but he had taken Holy Orders. He preached one sermon, but it was so lamentable in sense and language, and so ludicrous that it remained his sole literary effort.

During 1918, when for awhile as war correspondents we both inhabited

a French chateau, H. W. Nevins on gave me a book of his called *Between the Acts*. He was at Shrewsbury before my time and also at Christ Church, and once again our common experiences met on the Somme. The volume contains a witty and satyric essay on the passion at Shrewsbury for the Greek language. He was a man, most lovable in all respects and imbued with passionate ideals and with high courage. Life at school and even more certainly life at Oxford disappointed him. He wanted to penetrate to the ultimate causes of things, and the short-sighted dons desired him to get a good class in the schools. Later, like Lord Haldane, he sought a "spiritual home" at Göttingen and, for all I know, found the tangled obscurities of German philosophy yet further from the creative centre of things than the Greek classics. He was left stranded, not at the centre, but as a German philosopher wrote most pompously, "eccentrically in the hurly-burly of individual sequences." He finally found salvation in his own courage and in love of action. His name stands high as a war correspondent, and among the apparently lost causes that he helped to win was woman's suffrage. Few biographies of our time are of more worth than the three volumes of his *Chances and Changes*. What he thought and what he did are of equal concern to his generation. A saying of his which has rejoiced the heart of all who knew both men is to be found in a letter that he wrote to his friend and old master, A. H. Gilkes. When Gilkes retired from the mastership of Dulwich College he became a clergyman of the Church of England. His ancestry included a Quaker element, and their stern morality was his; but he had been considered as in some sort hostile to dogmatic religion. This sudden and unexpected step offended a number of those who had admired his Olympian character. Perhaps he himself wondered a little whether he was justified or no; but his sole desire in life was to do good to his fellows. Everything else was subsidiary, and details meant as little to him as, say, in a different reference, to Cecil Rhodes. He knew very well what people would think and writing to Nevins on he said humbly, "I hope you won't think any the worse of me." Nevins on answered, "I should not have thought worse of Socrates if he had become the high priest of Apollo;" and indeed, though he was one of the handsomest of men, as Socrates was one of the plainest, Gilkes inevitably suggested a parallel with Socrates and indeed his historian, Plato. The last time I saw Nevins on he was ill and over eighty years of age, and the war was at its most tragic stage. He told me that he was spending a great deal of time in writing lyrics. "You see," he said, "they need such concentration." He was a poet, an almost unrecognised poet, but it has seemed to me that his ballade with the refrain

There is no place but where my lady is

ought to be in all anthologies that deal with such verse. Perhaps he went to excess in his admiration for stark classical simplicity. Caesar's *Gallic War*, he once said to me, was his model and he quoted one of the stock phrases about pitching camp almost with emotion. "That is the way to write!"

Towards the end of the last war in 1918 I went out with him along the Somme to try to find the front of the retreating Germans, when a scene in one of the villages reminded him of a great Vergilian line:

Fluminaque antiquos subterlabentia muros

and for a while, forgetting the war, we discussed its comparative virtues with Milton's "Bosomed high in tufted trees." Certainly there are unrealised virtues in the classics, as imparted at the Public Schools and Universities! Maybe in these utilitarian days we need something utterly useless for practical ends.

Whether these homes of education were ideally good or bad I have no desire to argue. It is enough that they were incredibly pleasant places and nurseries of friendship, though the tyranny of games perhaps overwhelmed finer influences for a little while. Is there any lovelier scene in England than the crook of the Severn round about the beautiful old town of Shrewsbury? It is at its sharpest bend just below the schools, making a half circle round an old quarry and avenues of singularly tall elms, for Shropshire is the supreme county for tall trees. The place is familiar to thousands, to tens of thousands, because it is the scene of the biggest and most popular of all flower shows; but our love of it was not founded on a floral basis. A great scare was raised at one time because escaped muskrats had flourished and multiplied in its banks which they threatened to ruin. They could have found no more congenial haunt. Do the water rat and vole flourish anywhere in greater number? Lying in a boat you could make sure of watching their gambols, of noticing the pearl-like bubbles caught in the hair of the diving vole, and his double doorway below and above the water. The school was divided very abruptly into wets and dries. The cricketers spoke of "the duckpond below the hill"; but if all did not delight to row in an outrigger, the river was a common possession. He was not strictly a naturalist, but Henry Nevinson, who has written charming recollections of his life at Shrewsbury, was a fervent observer of life on the river. He had the advantage of being a cross-country runner but not a games player. As the Severn, he wrote, "passes beneath deep meadows and the solemn elms, it whispers still of the mountains from which it came. Into the midst of hedgerow villages it brings its laughing savagery, telling of another life than theirs."



Later I became familiar with the Wye as well as the Severn. Both rise in the splendid ridge of Plinlimmon and never wholly forget their home.

The famous "Severn bore," when a great high crest, maddened by the influence of the full moon, comes raging up the bed of the stream, often held by high banks, even this strange drama is hardly more exciting than to stand on the banks of the Wye at Hereford, when the hills have been full of rain. Inch by inch, then foot by foot, the water climbs the bare half-hollowed bank and on the swirling current come careering all sorts of flotsam that had been caught in the fringing willows and alders. One such sudden flood in midsummer hurried past us the unbroken nests of moorhen still full of eggs. It suggested the old myth of the kingfisher, setting its nest afloat on a halcyon sea; for though the river rose at this almost frightening rate, the weather in the valley was calm and sunny, suggesting no such tumult. The stream came down like a foray from the hills into the rich and peaceful plain. The spectacle vividly recalled the Severn to two of us as we stood on the banks of the Wye some forty years after our school days together at Shrewsbury.

Among famous old Salopians two may be mentioned for their influence, or lack of influence, on future generations. One was Sir Philip Sydney, whose death on the battlefield is depicted on the singularly beautiful war memorial; and if anyone should seek an example of the perfection of classical style he will scarcely find a better than the motto on that plaque: "*Alumnos tuos agnosco.*" It has that quality of brave simplicity and unsentimental condensation that all the world admires in the Marathon epitaph. There are some virtues at any rate that only the useless classics can inspire, as in this case they inspired that famous Horatian, T. E. Page.

The other great Salopian was Charles Darwin; but his influence on the school was non-existent. Science was not taught at all, and I never heard any mention of natural history or Darwin from any master. The head master's ignorance was almost a positive quality. I doubt whether he progressed even as far as a certain schoolmaster at Bradfield, whence he presently adjourned to the more congenial neighbourhood of London. "For my part," he once said to me with urbane humour, "birds are divided into just three classes: eagles, sparrows and domestic fowls!"

## CHAPTER FOUR



### Oxford



*I know the wood which hides the daffodil;  
I know the Fyfield Tree;  
I know what white, what purple fritillaries  
The grassy harvest of the river-fields,  
Above by Eynsham, down by Sandford, yields  
And what sedged brooks are Thames's tributaries.*

Thyrsis MATTHEW ARNOLD

DURING my last term at school it was discussed at home whether there was money enough to send me to Oxford. Generosity won the day; and most decidedly the winning of an exhibition to Christ Church greatly eased the situation. The exhibition was of an eccentric quality. It gave you £60 a year for four years, £27 for three more, £21 for yet another three. The origin of these odd sums I never discovered; but presumably they were designed to pay certain fees, for the taking of a B.A. and then an M.A. degree at the first possible moment was part of the bargain.

When I was shown my rooms in Christ Church on arrival there in the autumn of 1887, they seemed to me to be alarmingly luxurious, partly because a large bill for the furniture lay on the table. How could I wish my father to pay so vast a sum? and I began to consider the possibility of cutting out the more costly articles of furniture. The qualms were assuaged when it appeared that the money would come back when I left, and as I lounged on the window-seat and looked out on to the beautiful Christ Church meadows, I felt as if I were going to live "in the days of good Haroun-al-Raschid." In those meadows a friend (afterwards a brother-in-law) and I used to listen to a blackbird which whistled an air singularly suggestive of the first bars of Sullivan's "I have a song to sing, Oh." In those meadows the snakehead fritillaries were thick as bluebells by the Queen's Cottage in Kew Gardens. By those meadows a professor (afterwards my father-in-law) cunningly moored his punt by a device—for he was a born inventor—that took it back automatically to the further shore. The house from which he journeyed every morning to the Christ Church laboratory was of his own building and full of ingenuities, including in the garden an asphalt tennis court that could

be flooded into a skating rink in winter. Cher and Isis bound the sides of the meadows, one river the home of punt and canoe, and the most adorable idleness, the other the course of the outrigger and the sternest of athletic competitions. Among my first visitors in those luxurious rooms was a deputation which urged me to a rowing career, and it was a Homeric struggle to resist the urgency. I clung to my liberty; and though rowing is the worthiest form of athletics, it is a sort of slavery. My tutor was coach enough.

Christ Church in the jubilee year of 1887 was in some regards the worst of all the colleges, because it had a less corporate life. It was split up into sects to such a degree that even the games suffered. There was the rich "Bullingdon set," who spent much money and hunted and dropped its final 'g's.' There was, surprisingly, a strongly religious and rather high church group or set; there were the scholars and scholarly. There was one secret society of old standing, which brewed a marvellous punch and possessed a Frank Buckland drawing of the dodo; and such segregations were made more definite by the pattern of the architecture. Meadow Buildings, where I was situate, had few dealings with Peck Quad. About this date such disorganisation, such lack of unity in the college life became an offence to many members of the House (which abjures the name college) and reformation was sought. The first step was to form a junior common room; and incidentally, in the adaptation of a set of rooms in Tom Quad to this end, some missing parts of the lost St. Frideswide tomb in the cathedral were found in the excavated rubble, and how beautifully the oak leaves were carved into stone! When it became a question of finding a secretary of this new "get-together," as Americans call it, someone was sought who was unidentified with any particular set. It was pointed out that as I was a runner—and therefore concerned rather with the University than the college—and a scholar and a representative at cricket and football, I was not tarred with any particular brush, and so it came about that a deputation came to Meadow Buildings and asked me to be the first secretary under an Etonian—a great racquet player—as President. The Common Room flourished and did good, though my chief recollection is the infinite care taken in sampling the various brands of cigarettes advertisers sent for our approval.

I had almost forgotten all this, till I went up to a gaudy fifty years later, and a young don who sat next to me at the great carouse in Hall, asked me, apparently with ardent curiosity, whether I was not the first secretary of the Junior Common Room. He was a historian, but it seemed to me utterly astonishing that he should be acquainted with such a detail

of the past and have an interest in it. Again, more than fifty years later I made a new friend in a soldier who is a leading authority on most forms of athletics, and for the first time I was made to feel almost ashamed that we took athletics so light-heartedly. It was very good fun receiving a blue for athletics, and I never enjoyed running so well as in my second term at Oxford. It was my special task to make the running for the best miler and half-miler ever at Oxford, F. J. K. Cross, who became an established friend. When we met Cambridge at Queen's Club I had an absurdly rapid race over the first lap of the mile with a Cambridge pace-maker, and having, quite needlessly, beaten him, I looked round, gave the inside place to Cross and felt that my full duty had been accomplished; but we were first and second. Never again was running quite so enjoyable. I was to discover that my proper distance was a half or quarter mile, or, indeed, a hundred yards. I had won a quarter—the first I ever ran in competition—in less than fifty seconds, then an Oxford best on record; and athletics became a more serious business. Ought they to be a serious business? Some years after leaving Oxford I was asked to write "Athletics" for the Isthmian series, and made a plea on an early page for treating the running ground as a playing field and athletics as a game; and asked why so few people thought of running and jumping and the rest as a sport to enjoy "like a half-hour at the nets or a pick-up game." One reviewer selected the point for special commendation, but to-day it would condemn any book on the subject. Scientific preparation and concentration on one distance became more and more insistent. An American miler would be turned out of the team if he ventured to run a quarter. It is of course to this attitude and the adoption of expert coaches (who are also dictators) that records are reduced year after year. Present examples would have seemed to us ludicrous. The coach of one Englishman, who won the hundred yards in the Olympic games, explained how he squeezed the extra tenth of a second out of his pupil by counting the number of his strides in the hundred yards and compelling him to shorten each by just enough to increase the total by one stride. The one stride extra meant that less time was wasted in lifting the leg in the air!

It was doubtless a mistake not to take this sport with greater seriousness. But what would you? The pleasure of doing many things was irresistible. If one played both sorts of football and cricket for the college, and had a certain pleasure in cross-country runs and walks, and was supposed to justify the "eleemosynary assistance" to which the satiric don referred, to wit the scholarship and exhibitions, how was any specialisation possible or likely even to be considered? The trouble with young life is that it is too enjoyable.

Even an exam. may be good fun enough. A full scholarship fell vacant in my third year and was thrown open to all the exhibitioners. As we came out from the most important paper, the most likely winner—he was to become head master of a great school—told me with pride that he had written twenty pages upholding freewill. It seemed to me that he had mistaken the question. We had been asked to comment on a dictum of Locke's that it is absurd to speak of the freedom of the will, by which he meant that if there was such a thing as a will, it was necessarily free: freedom was a part of the definition. The moral and theological interests of my opponent (which afterwards found abundant scope in the pulpit) had clouded his judgment; and I was told afterwards that this essay had decided the issue in my favour.

Nothing in the scholastic portion of life at Oxford gave me so much pleasure as talks in the rooms of one of the examiners. He had a delightful gift of illustration. For example, in discussing Bacon's four causes he explained that an omelette was the final cause of a hen's egg. His illustration of the exceptions to the law of association of ideas was this: when Tobias' mother saw Tobias' dog she thought of Tobias, but when Tobias' mother saw Tobias she failed to think of his dog. Years afterwards I met that great humorist, Stephen Leacock, while he was writing his book, *My Discovery of England*, and he said that his absurd admiration of Oxford and its teaching methods was founded on his discovery that the dons did not teach their better pupils, they smoked at them. How very much more learning I should have acquired if there had been more smoking and fewer lectures!

Better things even than smoking in a favourite don's room befell. One day in Christ Church meadows a professor whom I did not know introduced himself. He was a man of wide learning, a really great chemist with a deep affection for the classics. His weakness was a surprising admiration for athletes and players of games. The beautiful house he had built on the banks of the Cher became a most welcome addition to the pleasures of Oxford; and I was tied to Oxford for life more intimately than most Oxford men. Many years later my marriage to one of his daughters was celebrated in Christ Church cathedral, which, of course, was also the college chapel. The cathedral had no parish, and in order to justify the proclamation of banns the Dean decreed that the bride must "undergo pernoctation," by which he meant that she must stay for two week-ends in one of the canon's houses that stood in the cloisters.

The seriousness of the final ceremony was utterly broken for me by the sudden sight of the round red Caldecott face of my old scout peering through the screen behind the stalls. His name was Frost. The last time

I saw him—when the quatercentenary of Christ Church was being celebrated—he was taking lunch to a young don, and complained of the decadence of the times. With a dramatic gesture he lifted the cover of the dish and disclosed a small omelette. Things had come to a pretty pass. There were no leavings for the college servants. They felt themselves to be the most permanent part of the college; and others agreed. A delightful old Cowley Father, who addressed us on the Christ Church mission to the East End of London, compared the college to the parts of the human body. The undergraduates changed most quickly like the hair or nails; the dons were the parts less rapidly renewed, and the scouts were the bony structure; and, indeed, they seem to continue indefinitely, and their memories are of granite quality. Some forty years after I went down I met a college servant, with whom I had had no particular association, and he not only recognised me, but told me where my rooms had been and who had been my contemporaries.

Scouts and college servants form a class that seems to develop personality. Is this the reason why they were the only members of the College who ever enjoyed the privilege of being addressed from the pulpit by the most retiring of all the dons, Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice in Wonderland*, whose other style and title were the Rev. C. L. Dodgson, author of books on mathematics and a picture logic. His Alice was one of the daughters of the Dean of Christ Church (who died while I was up), the famous Liddell of "Liddell and Scott;" and his gift to her of the MS. of *Alice* proved later to be worth a great many thousand pounds. Dodgson had a curious fear of being lionised, caused perhaps by the number of letters he received. When they came from authors he was wont to reply on a postcard containing the Delphic assurance: "I will lose no time in reading your book;" and he would sometimes ask other hands to sign the card, lest his signature should be exploited. I never met him, but he was a particular friend of my father-in-law, who much enjoyed his company; and "Alice" was my wife's godmother.

To return to the scouts, they were for the most part honest enough; but in a neighbouring staircase to mine a very reverend gentleman with a nobleman's air had the happy thought of selling the same corkscrew to each inhabitant of the staircase. When the corkscrew was wanted, "Mr. So-and-So had borrowed it." Since doubtless it had lasted through many tenancies it must have brought in very satisfactory dividends. My own scout took a fatherly interest in my training; but the only practical advice I remember receiving was an absolute prohibition against the cocoa he once found me drinking. "You'll never win on that stuff," he said, and I drank no more.

In one respect at any rate the Oxford system excelled the Cambridge. We lived in college for the first three years and out of college for the last, not *vice versa*. When that last year came I took a house with four others, thus avoiding the ordinary lodging and its expenses. We lived comfortably and more cheaply than most, though on one famous occasion we launched out into a dance. It proved a great success; and remained unique. When one of our guests tried to do the same, the proctor put his foot down.

There is magic in the word Oxford and in the place; but some of its most characteristic alumni are severe critics, and views of life there are various to the point of contradiction. A connection of mine who took a brilliant degree and became a don, left after a few years because he thought that half his undergraduate pupils wasted their time by coming to a university. He did not agree with Mr. Stephen Leacock, who as already recorded was genuinely afraid—with a quite needless fear—that he had as he said, slopped over into sentimentality in his account of Oxford and its methods of instruction. His view was that university lectures in both Canada and the United States were chiefly directed to the general instruction of the rank and file; and too little was done to evoke and develop the qualities of the higher intellects. The more democratic method seemed to him the less valuable in the sense of things. It may be that the two views are reconcilable: the best men are made better, the worse, worse. For myself affection for the place compels a certain prejudice.

When I went up in the Jubilee year of 1887 women's colleges were in existence, but the undergraduette of later days did not exist. She did not count in the life of the place; and the most remarkable thing in the Oxford of those days—a thing that utterly astounded foreigners—was the absence of any general concern with sex. It is not a little astonishing that some two or three thousand young men at the height of their lustiness should be grouped together without allowing sex a place in their ordinary curriculum. In general, though of course there were individual exceptions, even talk about sex was rare. The undergraduate, in spite of the demands of puberty, found other subjects of more interest.

Years after I went down I personally conducted a company of American athletes (who had been competing in Olympic Games) over Oxford. What chiefly amazed them was the multitude of playing fields and the percentage of undergraduates who could and did play games regularly and compete on the river. "We have nothing like it," they said. The Americans on the whole excel us in most efforts, because they are specialists; but if there were competitions of a thousand a side the British would win at almost any game. We can scarcely avoid the inference that this

democratic participation in sport is the chief influence in diverting minds from the obsession of sex. Yet what a deal is to be said against these games! They often monopolise life. I played both association and rugby football and cricket for the college, and had difficulty in avoiding the discipline of the river coach; and I was running and training continually for University athletics. Scarcely a peck of energy was left for other concerns, even for Oxford itself, and walks made immortal by Matthew Arnold.

Even those dons who did not smoke at one exacted, of course, some influence; and I felt a real friendship for both my philosophy teachers, especially Professor Stewart, a famous Aristotelian. He was full of learning: a fine scholar, an engrooved philosopher, an expert on Dante, a lover of English poetry. How pleased he was on one occasion when I happened to quote a line from a favourite poem of his by Robert Bridges, who was just beginning to be recognised.

And the sad ocean bellowed  
And pounded on the cliff.

The old scholar delighted in the emphasis on that most Saxon word "pounded." He was friend as well as tutor; but like every other don under whom I sat, an unsatisfactory teacher. He was too philosophic to see any differences or saliences. I had won a scholarship, thanks chiefly to an essay on the meaning and truth of freewill; and later asked him a question "There may be such a thing—just a little bit at the very end of development." He regarded man as a sort of sprout or prisoned caterpillar that could just waggle its tip by its own volition. It was all very philosophic, but not of much use in the schools. I think I may say with absolute truth that I never attended any lecture that was of the least service to me. All that remained of any one of them was a scarcely legible scrawl in a notebook. The fault doubtless lay largely with the pupil; but a good teacher would have set the matter right. The attendance at most lectures was just as much a waste of time as playing a game of football.

Nevertheless a something soaked in and helped to colour the rest of life. It is not a small thing to remember four years of intense pleasure, with scarcely a blot; or to find devotion to a place and an ideal grow greater with distance. Better teachers, if not better companions, presently arose in the college, which won unprecedented successes in the schools in the year of its quatercentenary. Would any school encourage thinking more successfully than the School of Literae Humaniores at Oxford, if you read it for pleasure not for success in the examination? It provides good fun even for the ignorant and idle; but being insufficiently harnessed,



he is apt to stray down by-roads, to read Hegel or Lotze or Hobbes, when he should be translating Plato or analysing Grote; or so it happened to me, though the tyranny of games and athletics was always the most serious handicap.

One little athletic disaster befell me. I was at the top of my form—had just completed a quarter under 50 secs.—when the Inter-University Sports were run—at Queen's Club—and in the quarter-mile, one of my two events, I started between the two Cambridge runners, Turner, the first string inside and Charles, the second string, outside me. Charles crossed my path and took the inside, then got in the way of his own man who shouted to him to clear out. He cleared with rapidity, and as I was a little in front of Turner knocked me head over heels. The ashes of the cinder path permanently tattooed my left elbow; but it was not the elbow that felt the bitter blow. As hard a fortune struck me in my last year when I was President. It came in the form of influenza and prevented me running at all. So athletically as intellectually the last terms at Oxford were something of an anticlimax. International athletics, which at once increased the quality of performance, did not in any real sense begin till after I left Oxford. I was indeed engaged under the direction of the treasurer of the O.U.A.C.—that most vigorous don, Mr. Jackson, of Hertford College—in making preliminary arrangements for the first English and American athletic meeting, which took place in the United States a year or two later. The first revival of the Olympic Games took place in Athens in 1896, five years after I went down, and most of the performances were of no account owing partly to the ill condition of the path. As a quaint example of the simplicity of the organisation, Cambridge representatives took out a portion of Fenland earth, which was always used in the Inter-University sports at Queen's Club for the long jump pit! The turns were so sharp that runners had almost to stop in getting round them. The Americans were the only people, except the Greeks, who had a considerable and well-organised team, and they won pretty well what they liked. I may give just one example of the slowness of the races. The equivalent of the half-mile was won in 2 min. 11 sec. Quite untrained, I had won a half-mile at Oxford in just over 1 min. 56 sec. Bad though performance was, and muddled the organisation, the zeal was incredible. Such a pitch has never been reached since. Of the 120,000 present on one of the chief days, 119,000 were Greeks; and the whole community went mad with excitement when a Greek, one Loves, won the Marathon race of about 25 miles. That brilliant scholar—and capable hammer-thrower—Mr. E. S. Robertson, who wrote a brief account of the games for a book of mine, said that "to the Greek the

games were the greatest achievement of his supposed race since, say, the conquest of Babylon by Alexander the Great. Politically the games undoubtedly did much to produce the subsequent war with Turkey. The Greek nation could only have embarked on such an impossible campaign from blindness to the realities of things, and this blindness was based on the idea that the Greeks had once more taken up the position of the ancient inhabitants of their country, and that the eyes of Europe were upon them. This idea was primarily produced by the Olympic Games." Mr. Robertson is said to have insisted on the recitation of a Pindaric Ode, which he himself, as he said, duly "concocted and spouted." "The victors (not to mention Loves, who was given almost all a grateful country could bestow) beside their laurel and olive branches, their medals and diplomas, received many offers of marriage, desirable and otherwise, and twelve neckties free of charge!" Well, in classical times, as Thucydides records, the victorious General Brasidas was welcomed on his return "almost as an athlete."

From such excesses I was saved by an interval of about five years.

## CHAPTER FIVE



### A Berkshire Interval



*There is a hill beside the silver Thames,  
Shady with birch and beech and odorous pine:  
And brilliant underfoot with thousand gems  
Steeply the thickets to his floods decline.*

There is a hill ROBERT BRIDGES

HOW many of those who are products of the public schools and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge finish their time with the vaguest idea of what they mean to do in life, or of what life is? Hundreds are robbed of a greater future by getting a good degree or winning athletic fame. I did know one man, much junior to me, who deliberately said to himself, so he told me, "A 'blue' is more important to my career than a good degree;" so with much labour he attained to sufficient skill to represent the University at lawn tennis, and subsequently made the organisation of the game his career, which in its degree was very successful! "In the long run men hit what they aim at," especially if it is not worth hitting. Less prudent undergraduates are apt to drift. A good example is to be found in the autobiography of that most eminent of athletes and excellent scholar, C. B. Fry, whom I first met while measuring, as referee, his best-on-record long jump at Queen's Club. While his friend and contemporary at Wadham, F. E. Smith, afterwards Lord Chancellor, saw a great future in the law, and achieved a first class by a last-hour bout of intensive cramming. Fry, who was the better scholar, had so delighted in the free play of life and his own powers of enjoyment that he never sought or found any permanent profession or vocation, and deliberately held the view that life is better so. His start was ominous. Like multitudes of less widely accomplished products of Oxford and Cambridge, he accepted the offer of a schoolmastership, and went back into the narrow round from which he had emerged. However, he soon broke loose; and did many useful and altruistic things; and found life, as he emphasises in his autobiography, exceedingly pleasant throughout.

There came to dine with me in my last term at Oxford a friend, of a year or two's seniority, who was later to become head master of Rugby and Bishop of Liverpool. I said to him, more or less light-heartedly,

"What shall I do in life?" a question that I had scarcely considered. The present had been too pleasant for thought about the future. He replied at once: "Come and teach at Bradfield," where he was an assistant master. What he suggested I presently did, in the same manner as C. B. Fry. If there had been any hesitation the overwhelming beauty of the place would have overcome it.

The result of the final schools had yet to come. My tutor had made an odd prophecy to one who had asked about my prospects. "All I can say is that he won't get a second. With luck he might get a first, without it a third. A second is impossible." The worse, and more likely, alternative befell; and for a short while I felt almost as miserable as that supreme scholar, A. E. Housman, when he failed altogether in the final schools; but we never know our own fortune. With a better degree I should probably have remained a schoolmaster, instead of spending no more than a few merry years pretending to teach, playing games, and enjoying Berkshire, which I have ever since regarded as the most beautifully varied shire within England's "coloured counties." Teaching is one of the noblest of professions for those who relish it, and one of the meanest for those who are not worthy.

The critics have been very busy with wrong-headed onslaughts on the public schools, and in a less virulent degree on the Universities. One cannot damn what one has enjoyed to the hilt; and indeed, making all allowance for prejudice, both seem to me for all their deficiencies to possess certain high virtues that would else be to seek, or at any rate much less prevalent. Yet one must confess, it is not a little outrageous that numbers of vigorous youth should reach the advanced age of twenty-two years or so without having touched the national life, and should then hurry off, merely for want of any other easy opening, to teach the rising generation, both unencumbered by any sort of training in the art of teaching and with little knowledge of the unsheltered world.

What, outside some precious friendships and delightful games and merry jests, chiefly remains with me of those few post-Oxford years? A lively stream, the Pang, flowed through the school grounds. On the banks I heard for the first time the churring notes of the grasshopper warbler, that so strangely resembles the revolving clicks of a fishing-reel. The chief fisherman on that particular reach was the village blacksmith, a radical politician, whose creed was summed up in the pregnant saying, repeated at all political meetings, "The Church is founded on beer," a sentiment that originated in a personal quarrel with the local brewer. What a fisherman he was! He would appear as a rule with the bats in twilight hours, often accompanied by two small-sons who "kept cave"

for him when he transgressed beyond the reach where he was permitted to fish. Most of his flies, except those we gave him, were made of bits of duck feather, faintly resembling the fly known as a coachman. It was an education to watch the lean foxy old man leaning forward to catch the reflection off the open pools between the weeds, and dropping his mothlike fly-float precisely on the desired spot. His success was almost unvarying, for he was a great artist, and the river was alive with trout.

A favourite haunt of mine was one of the sources of the Pang some miles higher up. There was a circular bush-enclosed pond, covered with water buttercups except at the very centre. There a spring bubbled through the finest and whitest sand so strongly as to keep a small circle quite clear of weed. Into this fat trout would paddle slowly from the surrounding growth to let the cool bubbles tickle their bellies. With a slow fin they kept themselves as nearly as might be above the centre of the spring in luxurious enjoyment and quite safe from the blacksmith's "Coachman." Nearby, where the stream half encircled a spinney, was a minute island. One summer Sunday I lay for long behind a tree in that spinney watching a family of young plover bred on the island. They moved about their two square yards of kingdom, fearlessly for the most part; but now and again one of the parents would fly past with a higher note in its wail, and then every chick would disappear, sinking low, and lying dead still in the grass. I could induce the same protective instinct by gently tapping the trunk of the protecting tree with a finger-nail.

How absurd it is that a profession should come second to such little things, which would be remembered, clearly as when first enjoyed, across the gulf of events that shook the world! Almost all the events of the war of 1914-1918, though I saw many of the greater battles, frequented trenches from one end of the lines to the other, and trod most of the British battlefields in France, are remembered, rather as a dream or nightmare is remembered, wrapped in a foggy unreality somewhere outside the course and tenor of life. They seem so remote in time and disconnected with particular space that they cannot be fitted into the pattern of actual things. The quiet English valley where I walked and read and played and—incidentally—taught, takes a very different place in the memory. Its events belong to the general pattern, and have contact with the present. Such contact was made the more sure by the accident that Yattendon was near Bradfield. There lived Robert Bridges, whom my Oxford Greats tutor so, admired (and about whose *Testament of Beauty* a connexion of mine wrote a book) and H. C. Beeching, who wrote a few good poems and some charming prose which saw the light in many successive numbers of the *Cornhill Magazine*, soon after I left

Bradfield for London, and the head master gave me a Shelley inscribed to one "ad ampliora munera discedenti." Yattendon is almost as perfect an English village as Selborne, a most fit home for poets and painters; and one familiar with that Berkshire scene and the Thames valley at its edge inevitably sees it repeated in a very large number of Bridge's best lyrics. It was an event when Beeching came to preach to the school. How characteristic was the first sermon that I heard him preach on the text "to obey is better than sacrifice." He repeated it in his rather sad, tired voice, shook his head, and after a long, almost painful pause repeated it once again with another pause half-way in his sentence. "To obey is better than sacrifice—and so much harder!" The least attentive carried that away with them. The head master, who had a theatrical bent, as his creation of the Greek theatre indicated, always took great pains to open his sermons with some startling sentence; but never achieved so penetrating an effect.

Neither of these famous dwellers in Yattendon had yet made a wide reputation. It was some thirty years later that Robert Bridges was invited to lecture at an American university. In spite of the satisfying fee, he refused on the plea of age; and was then asked whether he would come at the same fee to stay in the university for six months, "and be accessible." This he did; and the American undergraduate duly sat at his feet. I have never been able to appreciate his *Testament of Beauty* in comparison with his Berkshire lyrics: but has any octogenarian ever written verse of equal quality?

Our senior Common Room was made lively by a certain gift for epigram in several of its members. For example: one master was wont to tell stories of great length. He was known on a Corinthian football tour as Mr. Rack-on-tour, but that bad pun was excelled by the epitaph written for him by one of his colleagues. One verse ran like this:

He was born in '64  
And straightway began a story,  
And the point was well to the fore  
By the time he went to glory.

Everyone enjoyed the quick retort fired at a rather pompous parson who had upbraided a young master for saying that he found it very difficult to teach Divinity. "Why," he added, "I could spend the whole term on the first two words of the Creed." It was inevitable in such a company that someone should ask how long he would spend on the first of the two. It was refreshing in the midst of an otherwise serious account of junior cricket to come upon this epigram:

## THE WAY OF A COUNTRYMAN

His record, take it all in all,  
 Was not a very great one:  
 He seldom hit a crooked ball  
 And never stopped a straight one.

Such *jeux d'esprit*, whether good or bad, can add a deal of merriment to life in a common room, even of serious schoolmasters; and they were frequent.

The school boasted, as it seemed to me, the most literary of all the school papers, thanks in no small measure to one of the masters, James Watt, a son of the first and best-known of London literary agents. Some beautiful little essays on the country were written by Anthony Collett who was afterwards to show a like talent on *The Times*; and one of his Bradfield friends, A. E. Freeman, who was to be a *Times* editor, was such a good journalist that he started two papers when he went to Oxford, and made them both pay—an unheard-of achievement! Several of the masters played about with verse, mostly comic. In a highly-talented Address to Bradshaw, a line or two remains in my head:

—And I am left at railway stations lonely  
 Solely because I never dreamt that "A"  
 Meant "Thursdays only."

A charming character was the old Precentor, whose most highly-enjoyed amusement was being laughed at. He had about half-a-dozen stories which could always be extracted; and their repetition evoked an epigram that has real epigrammatic qualities, thus:

Beneath a spreading chestnut tree  
 The Old Precentor sat.  
 He caught the chestnuts as they fell  
 And put them in his hat;  
 And some were long and some were broad,  
 But all of them were flat.

## CHAPTER SIX



# London



*Romæ rus optas*  
Satires HORACE

TEACHING, as such, soon began to seem to me as uncongenial as the incidental accompaniments were pleasant: the companionship, which could scarcely have been more companionable, the country, the games, and the long care-free holidays, which could be spent at home, or the old holiday places, such as St. David's, as if after all boyhood were not past and done with. So at one stroke I left behind that engaging county and the disappointing career, and after a few months spent in France and Germany, plunged into London. It is strange how one's life, even in its less dramatic moments, discovers parallels in the great writers. My first regular job in journalism was as nearly as may be identical with Charles Lamb's as described in the *Elia* essay, *Newspapers thirty-five years ago*, just as memory of early life at home gained all sorts of new and permanent values when first I read Wordsworth's *Prelude*—and that was early.

The offices of the *Globe* newspaper were situated in the Strand. Charles Lamb's account of his early work on such a newspaper in such a place is one of the best, and the most amusing, though—in thorough keeping with the cardinal difference between town and country—it has not the charm of his recorded visits to his favourite Hertfordshire, to his relations at Mackery End, or to the old haunts of Isaac Walton about the Lea in the same shire. He rose early in the morning, went to an office in the Strand, and composed humorous paragraphs. Every detail in his account, even to the nature of some of his colleagues, became familiar to me by personal experience; but perhaps it will not be again repeated. The evening paper of those days, very much the same as in Lamb's day, has come to an end. The *Sun*, the *Pall Mall*, the *St. James's Gazette*, the *Westminster*, the *Echo* all went the way of the *Edinburgh*, of Macmillan's Magazine, and many other monthlies, usually known as "the heavies." Not only their bodies are gone. Gone is their spirit. Great portions of them were written for fun and in the zest of individuality. Cust's facetious headlines, to the *Pall Mall* leaders, the



short stories of the *St. James's*, the pious paragraph in the *Echo*, the poems in the *Pall Mall* and *Westminster*, and indeed the widely-known "Turn-overs" in the *Globe* were commercialised out of existence with scores of shorter-lived weeklies, set afloat largely for the sport of the game. Even the money received for contributions depended to some extent on their value as literature rather than on their popularity. If he liked your verses—such was my experience—the editor of the *Pall Mall* paid you two guineas. If he was lukewarm he paid you 7s. 6d.

The very nature of the money itself had a certain artistic interest that it was soon to lose. Those of us who were on the staff of the *Globe* received every Saturday morning a little bag containing golden sovereigns, generally five for those writers who wrote paragraphs and leaderettes from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. or thereabouts. I succeeded E. V. Lucas and C. L. Graves, who subsequently both reached a higher grade of professional humour on the staff of *Punch*; and when I left I secured the services of P. G. Wodehouse, who was "Commencing journalism." My colleague (who was the nominee of his friend, E. K. Robinson, that still famous countryman and founder of *Countryside*) was Harold Begbie, probably much the best hand at the humorous paragraph in prose or verse that the column had known since Lamb's retirement. His facility was scarcely credible: verse came from his pen almost at the speed of prose and occasionally it rose to poetry. It was credibly reported of him that he received a telegram from a weekly paper, for which he wrote verse on contract, demanding two poems on the death of Queen Victoria. He was just about to dress for dinner at a Brighton hotel when the telegram arrived, and he appeared punctually at the meal. When his friends asked "What about the verses?" he reported that they had been duly written and posted! When I was married he went to the Post Office and sent me a telegram, referring to the titles of the two columns at which we had toiled.

Happy hours and plenteous platters  
From "By-the-Way" and "Men-and-Matters."

Doubtless they were composed on the spot. Begbie's facility deserved perhaps that constant epithet "fatal"; but I have always felt that a real poet was lost in him.

Journalism has made some writers, Charles Lamb among them, but it has killed others. Lamb has given examples of the paragraphs that he wrote, which, he confesses or boasts, were "esteemed tolerable writing in those days." For the sake of so proud a parallel I cannot refrain from giving one parallel example. To compose five or six facetious paragraphs

within an early morning hour is the sort of task that might reduce the most persistent humorist to a state of melancholy; but it became almost a mechanical trick. As you travelled by train or 'bus to the office you marked passages in the morning paper that seemed to have the germ of a jest in them, if you could only think of it. If, for example, you read a paragraph recording that a swarm of bees had collected in a church clock you were quite sure that so extravagant, so *outré*, an event must give opportunity for some sort of ridiculous comment. The thing was like a crossword clue; and the solution would leap into your mind under the stress of the office and the advancing clock. Why, of course, the bees were there to "improve the shining hour." When inspiration was slow, unrhymed verse was a last resort. It filled a deal of space and was written as quickly as prose. I remember one about that most English subject, the weather, which began, "The temperature is more than mean, it's low."

Some of the more diffident, among whom, surprisingly, E. V. Lucas was included, would write a paragraph or two or a verse overnight; but that was regarded as a confession of weakness. Though the staff of the paper included two stalwarts—one a Cambridge wrangler—who were septuagenarians, the By-the-Way column was farmed by youth, and few survived more than a year or two. One of the exceptions, who had held the post for nearly eight years, suggested for his own epitaph, "I grinned through a horse-collar for twice four years."

My own release came soon in a singularly beneficent form. J. L. Garvin, already recognised by many as the best journalist of his day, had become editor of the *Outlook*, a weekly paper of which high hopes were entertained. He was in no sense a naturalist, but not even Wordsworth, whom he worshipped, had a more essential insight into the secret influence of nature. He asked me to join the staff and write about the open air. Thenceforward he and Edward Greigg and I wrote a very large part of the paper, and enjoyed nearly two years of the rarest zest and merriment. J. L. G. was always fertile in suggestions for me as for everyone else; and indeed opened the doors of literature wide enough for all to enter. Even the poets and other writers one had most loved and knew best took on a brighter light, and have never for a moment since lost or diminished their lhaloes. The companions who have this power always to add a gleam are few and precious. Those were golden days; and for me at any rate, after a wide interval, they held a continuous sequel, I was to be a colleague of Garvin and his eldest daughter up to the year 1943.

The proprietor of the *Outlook*, Mr. Sydney Goldman, sold the paper

rather suddenly to Lord Iveagh (who did not want it) and his son, Mr. Walter Guinness, later Lord Moyne, took command, and the quality collapsed within a week and was never recovered. It was a sad break-up. The *Outlook*, in Lord Haldane's phrase, "was a spiritual home." To write weekly articles about "Clouds" or "The meaning of green" or "Prim-roses" or—not to put too fine a point upon it—on earwigs or crewiggles, is not an occupation to talk big about. And yet it was while writing there, under the stimulus of a great critic and a greater friend, in the pleasant surroundings of an old and odd country cottage, often to the accompaniment of children's voices that the conscious conviction was born: the country matters most. To be out of doors was to be happy; and the feeling that you were wasting the opportunities of life, if you stayed indoors more than was necessary, has survived into the eighth decade.

When the *Outlook* broke up, and "The Open Life" ceased to appear at the top of a column, journalism became a new sort of profession. It is of course not one profession but many. Editor, sub-editor, reporter, special correspondent, leader-writer; freelance and regular daily journalist and weekly journalist have jobs wholly different in kind, which do not necessarily lead from one to another. For example, the chief work of the sub-editor—in the eyes of the reporter—is to cut out what other people write and to write nothing himself. It was after I had been in London about two years that my Oxford tutor, Walter Hobbhouse, came up to edit the *Guardian*. He knew nothing whatever of journalism as such, and thought, as he confessed, that "lead type" was type of a peculiar blackness. He was not perhaps the worse editor on that account, though his still donnish modesty may have been a handicap. The first time I wrote a leader for him in his new position reminded me of the first time I took him a copy of verses. He had set for translation into Latin elegiacs the Shakespeare sonnet, "If I could write the beauty of your eyes," and I had bungled through with no little effort. He read my clumsy version, made no comment, except that he found one phrase ingenious, and handed me a singularly perfect fair copy of his own with the apology: "I don't know whether you will find that any better!" His absurd modesty and trick of under-statement seemed to belong to his long, loose person and sad, invalidish face; but he was in reality endowed with many special gifts, including a very pretty humour. When I first joined the *Outlook* and left the *Globe* I told him that I was giving up daily journalism. He congratulated me, and added with a conscious melancholy: "I myself often sigh for a quarterly." What a vision of desirable leisure was there!

Mr. Lathbury, the editor whom Hobbhouse succeeded, had left to start

a paper of his own, *The Pilot*, a weekly about halfway between the *Guardian* and the *Spectator*, and a rival to both. It was very charming in appearance and in matter; but doomed to a short life. I regarded it with particular affection because it was content to publish verses of mine (as well as articles). One of them, in the form of Latin mottoes for a sundial, was written at the particular request of Mr. Lathbury, the editor, who liked his bit of Latin. It is, of course, quite impossible not to admire the paper that accepts you as a poet; and there are some papers for which it is good fun to write, while others—perhaps the better ones—overwhelm you with seriousness. For example, I hated writing for the *Saturday Review*, though I was on the staff, and thoroughly enjoyed the *Pilot*. So earlier, I found writing for the *Standard* a business, for the *Manchester Guardian* a pleasure. You could play in its ample pages as you could not within the narrow form of the *Saturday Review*. My wife, a very new one, and I were living, to start our married life, in a flat overlooking Battersea Park; and I wrote one article in the *Pilot* describing the perfection of the Park's landscape gardening, which is indeed a model example of the art. Since apt quotations, illustrating the theme, did not suggest themselves, I made them up, and their appearance was most pleasing and impressive. They broke up the solid prose admirably to the eye, and read like real quotations; or I suppose they did, for nobody ever made awkward enquiry about any of them. The only one I can remember referred to a laburnum in full flower:

In a green fountain wisps of falling gold.

The first paper to accept a serious verse was a weekly of some standing, though it was then near its latter end, called *The Speaker*. The pleasure of seeing the lines in print was subsequently rather damped by the non-appearance of any cheque; but after several letters I extracted an answer to the effect that I should be paid "in good time." Another long period elapsed, so I wrote once again, to ask "Is the good time coming?" and received the large sum of ten shillings by return of post! Now this little verse, perhaps because it was the first to be "advantaged by type" had remained in my memory, from which other early verses have completely vanished; and years afterwards I put one line into inverted commas: "The beauty's ruin and the life's defeat," and was horrified to get a letter from a well-known Cambridge don, asking me where the line came from. I have never heard whether or how much he was enraged when he received my shamed confession.

If anyone is disposed to regard journalism as one profession rather than as a bundle of professions, let him at the same time work for an

evening and a weekly paper. While making feeble jests in the early morning on the *Globe* under the editorship of a retired naval lieutenant, possessed of all the more robust qualities of naval officers, I was on the staff of the once famous *Saturday Review*, edited by Harold Hodge, whose prevailing passion was for Church politics and highest admiration restricted to Fellows of All Souls. Within an hour or two of joining the paper he asked me to write a leader on "Rectorcraft." If it had been on rural crafts I could have written with joy; but of Rectorcraft I had not even heard till I was handed a budget of articles by Lord Hugh Cecil. I suggested that my commendation would be hardly "commendation indeed," but rectorcraft it had to be. The paper had been brilliant in the days when among its writers were reckoned the Lord Salisbury who was Lord Hugh's father, and Sir William Harcourt, that able and rather cynical wit, who made two of the best literary puns in our annals, and invented the Death Duties. It showed gleams of brilliance under the unstable editorship of Frank Harris, who was more conspicuous as a critic of Shakespeare than as a moralist. The paper was made self-supporting both under him and afterwards by his skill in securing financial advertisements. A steady flow of this valuable source of revenue continued for a great many years. The *Saturday Review* had been put on a list of papers to which advertisements of new companies should be sent; and in our conservative country on that list it had remained. Throughout Harold Hodge's rule the circulation was in the neighbourhood of three thousand copies a week; but it supported itself nevertheless.

I joined about the date when Bernard Shaw resigned his job as dramatic critic and handed over the torch to Max Beerbohm. The old brilliance survived in the three critics of music, art and drama: Runciman, who really hated bad art; MacColl, who was poet as well as artist and maintains in old age the promptings and skill to write good verse; and Max, who remains quite incomparable. The editor, whatever his other deficiencies, was very loyal to all three, though not always very acute in his perception of their virtues. One day he brought me one of Max's articles, and asked whether Max had gone mad. Ought we to print the article; which, he said, was no more than a tissue of quotations in several languages? The offending article was in fact a most ingenious and able parody of A. B. Walkley, the dramatic critic of *The Times*, who was at least as fond of French phrases as Mr. Bernard Darwin of quotations from Dickens. Bernard Shaw, who started journalism as a leader-writer on the *Star*, became both a musical and dramatic critic; but with much more wisdom than most critics, gave up as soon as he had said the things that he wanted to say about these arts. Even lesser critics may reach a

point when the zest goes, because the more general theories have been already expressed. About this time I reviewed continuously for some two years a novel a week for the *Times Literary Supplement*, brilliantly and most soundly edited by Sir Bruce Richmond, a first cousin of my wife's. It was great fun at first; among much of inferior quality some of the first stories of Conrad (including the gorgeous TYPHOON) and early novels of Henry James made their appearance.

It is easy to abuse reviewers, but their job may be made almost impossible by the ardency of most publishers for *immediate* reviews. Many novels die in six weeks, and reviews, if they are to be of value in increasing circulation, must appear in the early life of the novel. The book would often reach me on a Tuesday with the request that the review should be posted the next day. It was said of the old *Daily Telegraph* that one reviewer was especially popular with the editor because he sent back a column by return of post and the book uncut! I have never reached that pitch of technical excellence; but it was physically impossible for a busy man to read through the book he was reviewing, or indeed to do more than skip like a restless butterfly. Skipping is doubtless an art of itself; and happily most writers announce their quality almost at once, as you may tell a good golfer by seeing him make one stroke; but doubtless mistakes are apt to occur; and an artist who has spent perhaps years of honest work is damned by a critic who has spent a short hour with his book. Contributions suffer in a like way. The editor of the most popular of illustrated weeklies told me once that he could not afford to read half the articles that were sent in. They were rejected without a glance. Perhaps for this reason I found, in freelance days, that the "heavies" were the easiest of access. They had time to read contributions, which probably were not exceedingly numerous.

Work on the *Saturday Review* was for the most part singularly un-congenial, though it had bright moments; but its most inglorious decease many years later at the hands of Lady Houston was a cause of lament. A great name perished.

Journalism is very good fun (though not always very lucrative in the total sum) for those who are tolerably young and remain in the experimental stage, trying this sort of writing and that, in prose and in verse, in this paper and that. You never know what niche, if any, is open for your statuette, or whether your work of art is good enough for any niche. Each article and the posting of it is an adventure with the odds strong enough against you to give excitement to the game and extra zest to the success; nor were particular and doubtless inevitable failures bitter. The first man I knew at all in London journalism, C. L. Graves,

said on my first introduction: "Don't be afraid of boomerangs;" and recorded how his first article was rejected twelve times, and then accepted by the *Spectator*, which was the most difficult paper in London for an outsider to enter.

At the beginning of this century, but not long afterwards, the nature of London journalism added its quota to the gusto of the game. Newspapers were continually being started, and many, as I have said, were written as much for the fun of the game as for financial success. A number of evening, weekly and monthly—especially monthly—papers were open to assault from freelance outsiders. It is recorded, perhaps truthfully, of the greatest journalist of our age that as a very young provincial he sent a series of political articles to the *Fortnightly Review* with a covering letter to the effect that it was great presumption on his part to venture to offer an article to a great metropolitan Review, but that if the article was accepted it must be "put first and published in full and at once!" This brave combination of modesty associated with consciousness of merit stormed the citadel at once, and "Calchas" became the most highly admired contributor, month after month, to that *Review*.

For my part co-operation with "the Garve" on the *Outlook* had more of "the deep power of joy"—the editor's favourite quotation, and mine—than any work I ever did. It seemed almost a crusade to proclaim each week the inner glory of nature worship. With what immense pains each article was produced! often with the hot gusto of a lyric verse and the same careful revision.

A good part of the class of journalism, written whether for fun or for causes, was scotched on the day that the *Daily Mail* was first produced and the goldmine of newspaper production was opened. Thereafter nearly all papers that did not produce dividends were surrendered. Fleet Street and the Strand were strewn with corpses. Journalists used to boast of the number of papers they had presumably killed. They had contributed to the last number and flattered themselves that their article had dealt the *coup de grâce*. I could claim at least two such scalps, one of them W. E. Henley's own review. Evening papers, famous as the *Pall Mall*, weekly papers, famous as the *Saturday Review*, "heavies," famous as *Macmillan's Magazine* (a favourite niche of mine), all gave up the unequal contest; and this room was taken chiefly by the scores of worthless weeklies produced by large and rich organisations. The "Amalgamated Press" alone contributed about three-score, but the author and begetter of this type of paper was George Newnes; and the title of the most successful, *Tit Bits*, shamelessly acknowledged the nature of the breed. Some fifteen years after he had coined the sentence, my old head

master's description gathered treble its force. However, has not so fine a journalist as H. G. Wells recorded how contributions to the worst of such papers put money into his lean purse and food into his starving stomach?

It was round about the time of this essential change in the nature of London newspapers and in the career of many journalists that the *Outlook* changed hands. Soon after the break-up of the paper F. E. Smith, as he then was, happened to come down to my cottage home and said, with his usual uncompromising emphasis, "the paper is positively illiterate," and it was, and perished of its illiteracy. It is a remarkable thing that people who know nothing about journalism or literature think that they can manage and write a paper at least as well as any specialist. Garvin, with great grief for the loss of his *Outlook*, went back to his first friend, the *Daily Telegraph*, Edward Greigg returned to *The Times*, and the humblest member of the trio went to the *Daily Mail*.

The *Outlook* won a host of friends. One of them was Sir Rowland Blennerhasset, who had once had a like paper of his own. Every Friday, after we had sent the paper to press, we dined with him at Brooks's club and talked till midnight. I was alone in the office one day when a lady, "divinely tall and most divinely fair," was announced. She came to offer an article—far beyond the wonted length—on a visit to a North African tribe; and pleaded so hard for absence of the blue pencil that she won most of her points. She was Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland. Thereafter we attended her routs at Sutherland House, and so splendid a picture of London society was perhaps never seen as her reception of the guests in that great hall: *Incedit Regina*. I was watching her on one such occasion with Mr. Deakin, Prime Minister of Australia; and he said to me a thing that altogether took my breath away. "What strikes us," he said, "above all else in London is your amazing vitality." It was not the sort of compliment that an old country expects from the new world.

The vitality of the Duchess at any rate was amazingly illustrated during the war. A Belgian hospital, where she was working, was overrun by the Germans, who at first treated the Duchess with no little contumely. She thereupon began to order them about with contemptuous dignity: and at once they all succumbed. She could do what she pleased, and presently was pleased to announce that she was going back to Britain.

It was through the *Outlook* (which had such influence with the politicians that they became a nuisance on the telephone) that I first met Alfred Lyttelton, of whom someone said that everyone knew how charming he was, who got within a hundred yards. He was, it may be, a better tennis player than a politician (as an enemy said of Lord Grey



whom Lyttelton succeeded as champion), but the charm of both men was felt from afar. One of the friends of the paper was George Meredith. We were producing a Trafalgar Day number, and Meredith was induced to send a poem; and a very good one it proved. The final line:

And victory in his ears sang gracious death,

is unforgettable. At the same time he wrote Garvin a delightfully Meredithian letter to the effect that he liked his writing; and added, if I quote rightly, this sentence: "Most journalism is either brandy or pap; or both in execrable mixture."

A connexion of mine, for a while one of Meredith's near neighbours, had just read Beauchamp's Career, and told Meredith how he liked it. The one question the proud author asked was: "Did you notice my English equivalent for a *tête-à-tête*?" Unfortunately, for Meredith was disappointed, he had forgotten that "You and I." On his eightieth birthday Meredith, interviewed by Izzard, on behalf of the *Daily Mail*, was asked what he thought of some of his contemporaries. With great dignity, almost pomposity, he drew himself up and said, "I have not climbed the steps of eighty years to use them as a pulpit."

The question doubtless deserved a snub; but it is a hard question to avoid. I once put a like question to Hardy (though not in an interview), and he answered in a not less characteristic way than Meredith: "Oh yes," he said, "I like Meredith. I read Meredith—about a page a day!"

Good writers are wont, or such is my experience, to be characteristic in common conversation. The last time I saw Barrie I reminded him of a sentiment he had written under pressure in a war correspondent's autograph book. It was this grim warning. "Beware of a pale woman with a large appetite!" He capped it by telling me of a like request from a schoolboy, who had a book with differently tinted leaves. When Barrie began to write his name, the boy stopped him with horror at his presumption. "The blue pages," he explained, "are reserved for cricketers." With what luscious intonation Barrie pronounced that word "cricketers," for whom he, too, had a boy-like admiration.

Its many friends and brilliant editors could not save the poor *Outlook*. A great future for it seemed imminent; but it did not as yet pay dividends. The proprietor went off to South Africa, where a good deal of his money was locked up; and thereupon, suddenly and without warning, decided to sell the paper; and the blow presently proved mortal.

## CHAPTER SEVEN



### A Throw-back



*Once again I see  
These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms,  
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke  
Sent up in silence, from among the trees!*

Tintern Abbey WORDSWORTH

LOVE of the country can be greatly enhanced by a term of imprisonment in a town. W. H. Hudson, who spent long periods in London, had this experience in his earlier days; and incidentally it was in a dusty office off the Strand that in his old age he asked me whether I could find him a small country cottage "with a tree in the garden." That was the one necessity. My experience for what it was worth, upheld the practise of film-makers who give you quick and sudden "throw-backs." They are a device, wholly true to psychology. Such a "throw-back" (which I must in honesty insert) was made more frequent and more vivid by a sort of rediscovery of the poets, especially Wordsworth, and, I must confess, Francis Thompson, thanks largely to the gusto of J. L. Garvin. His memory was such that at the top of his power he would have made a full anthology of most of the greater English poets without consulting a book; and favourite passages would be recalled with inimitable zest at the most unexpected moments, like a bout of sudden laughter. They would be flushed, like finches from a hedgerow or a covey of partridges. What an exuberance and subtlety of meaning, what warm satisfaction, what brand-new beauties a simple line of verse may convey, when you have heard it rolled out in apt application by a fellow friend!

As harboured in the vine  
Hang the gold skins of undelirious wine

still sets chords vibrating with an inner music altogether beyond conscious analysis or verbal argument; or, shall I say? common sense. Two of the best men I have met—one of them Lord Grey—have owed to the unceasing inspiration of one and the same passage in Wordsworth, buttressed by a score of parallel passages of like meaning and scarcely inferior force

and influence. It would be like losing a home to be unaccompanied by *Tintern Abbey*. There are just a hundred lines (beginning, "Once again I see these hedgerows") which contain the whole creed of the countryman, to be repeated aloud in places of beauty where altars are lifted to the north and south and east and west, and wherever the eyes are bent. Has any poet, any writer, even the very greatest, given the English a more precious gift? It is so complete that addition seems impossible.

I was brought up on one edition of Wordsworth supposed to be complete; but about this time I made the discovery that the *Prelude* was omitted, except for one short excerpt. Later, when reading—and reviewing—that charming book of essays, *Fallodon Papers*, I found that Lord Grey had suffered by the same omission; and he devoted one essay and one lecture to this once despised poem.

The *Prelude* is just straight and considerably long-winded blank verse autobiography, but out of its cloudy narrative break flashes that come from the very sun of poetry itself. To any boy brought up in the country it may well bring memory and give meaning to the spirit of his youth, but it is also amusing to notice the similarities of experience. One of the most ingenuous and pictorial passages in the *Prelude* is of the young poet setting "springes" for woodcock, we may infer with no little success, though now and again to the terror of his conscience, he took woodcock from other boys' snares. In our midland fields we used not springes but "springals" (perhaps a local word). They consisted of a wooden frame equipped with a number of horse-hair slip-knots; and they were usually set to catch fieldfare. These hungry thrushes would come down from the North in hordes and fall to work ravenously on the great crops of purple haws. Old thorn bushes of unusual size grew in lines and clumps over the spacious glebe, by the moat that had once protected some palatial house and by the grassy mounds that told of old foundations. This old garden of Eden (though now, it may be, more garden-like than of old to the countryman's taste) had encouraged the growth of thorn, though not of briar. The hot, thick, satisfying scent enveloped the scene in June and the petals fell into the nests of large numbers of blackbirds, thrushes, greenfinches and chaffinches, pigeon and turtledove which delighted to nest in them. In autumn the green leaves faded into a brilliance, more gorgeous than any tree or bush, except the spindles. In winter the deep, almost uniform purple, was like a robe, an arras, till the hungry thrushes arrived and when they had finished they left only a dark filigree. The hawthorn (under which Elizabethan and Jacobite shepherds told their tale, that is, counted their flocks) became the master shrub of England when the official enclosure of the open fields ordained its use for hedges; but it was

always most English; and always its seeds were sown broadcast by the tribe of thrushes, whose quick juices, perhaps, ensure the germination of the else stubborn seeds. Even Wordsworth's strange terror, on returning with his woodcock, came within our experience.

I heard among the solitary hills  
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds  
Of undistinguishable motion, steps  
Almost as silent as the turf we trod.

So we. Coming home one deep twilight evening, my brother and I with one accord took out and opened our clasp knives and ran at full speed past the darkest corner of the spinney. We could never explain to ourselves or anyone else the strange unreason of this frightened flight. After all, when you are very young, it is very good fun to make yourself afraid.

The springes on that day had not been nooses either of wire or horse-hair, but rabbit nets, and the making of these was the one domestic art that we acquired. The taking of rabbits by this device is a strange sport. You must stand stock still or there will be no bolting; and the stillness gives a sort of tensity to all sensations, not least when sudden rumblings are heard below ground and you know that the ferret has begun his fell pursuit. We would often, taking the netted rabbit alive, carry it off to a distant field and let it escape out of sight of the dogs in order to watch their strange fidelity in pursuing the exact line taken by the vanished rabbit. It was a cat and mouse game, but at least it gave the animal a sporting chance for its life. The pursuing pack often consisted of two very small beagles, which never wavered from the track, and too eager fox-terriers which perpetually overran it.

The engaging rabbit has been completely annihilated in Denmark, where farming is all in all; and a like extermination, urged in England, has been almost achieved during the war. Yet it is quite hard to imagine a countryside without rabbits. Every evening we watched them come out from their spinneys and make their playful sallies into the open field. We found the short holes where the does gave birth to their young in a bed lined with the mother's softest fur. Though we were too much like Tom Tulliver in this regard, who was "very fond of birds, that is of throwing stones at them," they were merry things to watch; and their life little affected by the host of enemies. Sentimental people (who include many sportsmen) are saddened by the spectacle of a "nature red in tooth and claw;" but both fear and pain are forgotten by bird and beast in the twinkling of an eye. I have seen a rabbit considerably wounded by a shot, stop twenty yards away and gnaw the bark off an ash sapling that

had caught its eye. The rabbit, of course, has a great many enemies. Even the little owl will attack it. I once found a nest in a hollow branch containing one egg and one young owl snuggled up against the fur of a bit of rabbit that was its latest food. The absence of the rabbits in the war has turned the great buzzards, which are their persistent enemies, on to alien food, such as young birds. Since the rabbit is an even worse enemy to the afforester than to the farmer, the Forestry Commission killed tens of thousands in their Norfolk and Suffolk woods and wired out all would-be intruders. When this was accomplished the surrounding lands suffered almost a plague of stoats and weasels, banished from the foodless acreage of young trees.

To all these dangers natural to the life of the rabbit was added poison. In England, as in Australia, a wide campaign was set afoot. Was it justified? "They love not poison who do poison need"; and our natural shrinking from such means of destruction is an instinct—so I feel—that we are right to listen to. In the midst of the serenity of the country scene, it seems almost a sin in the soul to fill the holes with dead bodies that draw a worse enemy, the grey sewer rats, to the congenial carrion. Is this sentimentality? Perhaps, but poison and trapping offend the spirit. If you have heard rabbits screaming with pain in the night season and released (as often) their tortured bodies from snares, you cannot but feel that the sum of pain in the world has been brutally increased, at any rate by the steel-toothed trap. Even poison is the better choice; and the buzzard and stoat and gun seem almost humane.

One must be just even to poisoners. One experiment in extermination greatly interested me. That native naturalist, Mr. Lockley, showed me, on his favourite island of Skokholm, how impossible farming was made by the union of bracken and rabbits; and the charm and use of the island, both, would have been greatly increased by the disappearance of the weed and animal. In so narrow a space, walled and paled in by the sea, the utter clearance of both should be possible; and the I.C.I. meditated a thorough experiment to this end. When peace returns this may be accomplished.

How lovely is bracken on the hill sides and in many English woods! but it is a really terrible enemy invader. On a beautiful hill farm owned by an old friend, in Merioneth, I have seen the shepherd in despair and the mountain sheep in agony from the attacks of the fly that is nursed in the bracken; and year by year the fern was also advancing further over the good grass fodder. I saw a like threat quite defeated by a Scottish farmer in Dumfries, and I cannot but think that the government should lend a hand wherever land can be reclaimed—from the marsh, from the

sea (as by the Wash) or from some prevailing weed, such as this persistent fern, this successor to the thorns and briars of Eden. England is too precious, too lovely to be eaten up and defaced.

About our midland home was no bracken, but after my young days, every time I returned from London, I saw further signs of relapse to prairie. It is scarcely credible that neglect, even decay, should take place within sixty miles of London, but thereabouts almost every village was dwindling rapidly in population, and quite literally thorns and briars, that is dog-rose, field-rose, blackberry and hawthorn, were taking possession of the fields. Others were hummocky with ant-hills and mole-hills; and rough, if sometimes lovely, plants such as rest-harrow, knapweed, moon-daisy, thistle and twitch. The great and splendid churches stood like cenotaphs of a defunct civilisation, out of all relation to the pitiful handful of inhabitants grouped around them. Little Gidding, of which I have written, is but one instance. It neighbours a village with the proud title of Great Gidding. Towards the end of the last century, this numbered some eight hundred souls, as its parson would have said. Early in the century it had fallen to some two hundred, and many of the cottages had fallen into unremembered ruins. The melancholy of such a spectacle has twice overwhelmed me in greater examples in other places: once at Galway, once in Constantinople.

What has happened to our rich and lovely country that it should be thus abandoned? That ardent pioneer of the new economic farming, Mr. Orwin, discovered a village on the edge of the chalk downs near Marlborough which had clean vanished. When, at his suggestion, I went to look for it, the chapel had been pulled down for road-making (as iconoclastic farmers had broken up the pre-historic stones of Avebury). The site of the cottages was undiscoverable. All that remained of the biggest farmhouse was a wall of a yard or two in height. Instead of a community of land-workers, one mounted shepherd was the sole remaining husbandman over many hundred acres which had once been rich with corn.

What had happened? Were we seeing the approaches to the end of yet another proud and splendid civilisation? Here was a desert almost as real as the sandy waste where the trunk of the statue of Ozymandias, once "King of kings," lay half buried and wholly forgotten. The difference was that he reigned in a desert, and our vanished farmers in a land of clay. Now clay is the richest of all soils, at least in the mineral contribution to fertility, but it exacts day-labour. With every lost labourer, every day omitted from the winter task of clearing ditches, water and weed returned, as thorns and briars to Eden. No "lone and level sands stretched far away." Looking from the vantage point of Little Gidding you saw

a scene familiar to a score of generations: a sweetly undulating country, green fields, homely enclosed with hedges, green, purple or brown in their seasons and bracketed everywhere by trees; little woods with appropriate names—Gidding Gorse, Hamerton Grove, Salome Wood or Barnwell Wold. Towers and spires rise from the trees. As strangely eloquent as the battlements and spires of the great churches stands a windmill set on the highest point. It had once ground the corn for surrounding farmers and for hundreds of gleaners. Its sails no longer revolved and no wagons went to and fro on its private road. All except its sport had fled, for Gidding Windmill remained a famous meet for the Fitzwilliam hounds, as Gidding Gorse remained unrivalled as a fox covert. The exact record of Little Gidding in money may be told. In 1777, when money was double its present value it was bought for £22 an acre, and a great deal of money spent on building cottages and one homestead, all so solidly done that a hundred and fifty years and more has not seriously diminished their real worth. In 1915, land and buildings together were bought for £12 an acre as a plausible speculation, but after waiting twelve years for the expected rise the speculator sold the same property freehold for £4 10s. an acre, making a sum less than the value of half the houses. So do we English despise and cheapen our own land. Has the change come? Or will it come when England is replanned after the war? What a glory it would be to hear a full and prosperous congregation singing hymns of praise in those great and splendid village cathedrals!

With what fresh and vivid zest, when first I was immured in London, I used to escape for a day or two to the old home, cover the nine miles from the station on a bicycle and as I remember writing in a *Pall Mall* verse (a guinea one, I think)—

Keep the finches stirring  
Along the hedgerow side.

The roads were as well looked after as the fields were neglected, and their wide grass edges kept the hedges far enough away not to hinder the view. The nine miles were as nothing. It seemed but a few minutes before the battlements of the vast church came into sight. Delight in the home scene surged up with a new force. What had been an instinct became a conscious creed. There and nowhere else was the background of life, the very measure of beauty itself.

## CHAPTER EIGHT



# The Country in Fleet Street



*Oh! but to breathe the breath  
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet—  
With the sky above my head  
And the grass beneath my feet.*

The Song of the Shirt HOOD

ONE stage in my professional career was over and done with—at any rate for some thirty years. The freelance days were over. The weekly journalism (that contradictory phrase), accompanied by some of the activities of the freelance, was over. The one piece of advice given me by a very old hand as I entered the profession was not to put my eggs in one basket; but there comes a time when it is wise to neglect such advice, however good it was for the beginner. My trouble was how to square a desire to live in the country and have time to enjoy it with an exacting professional job.

Many crucial questions asked for an answer, now that the "old careening riot" was over. How abominably professional would the future be? Would London fill the room of the country and an urban mind be induced by environment? The threat of such a lamentable fate was dissipated in two amusing, but crucial, interviews with Lord Northcliffe, that destroyer of the old journalism. His spacious ceremonial room in Carmelite House was beautifully furnished and decorated. It could not have been otherwise, for Lady Northcliffe, who had seen to it, had an impeccable taste, a real genius in this department of art. The considerable walk up to the large man at the large desk induced a little nervousness (as he meant it to) in those whom he interviewed. No man could be more terrifying when he really tried; but he could also be charming. He could be narrowly practical, but he could also be imaginative. That day the more agreeable epithets had the mastery, and to the day of his death I saw in him a "chief"—as he was always called—whom it was very pleasant and honourable to serve. His idea was that the country had never been properly treated as a source of news. Writers in newspapers were so utterly urban that reference to country pursuits were wont to contain "howlers," repeated year after year with fresh additions. "The crack of



the rifles on the moors" on August 12th was no parody; and quite apart from such inaccuracies, the breath of the country seldom found its way into Fleet Street (though I have met there both thistledown and butterflies!)

Now one of the greatest changes that Lord Northcliffe had introduced into his technique of daily newspapers was the dethronement of the editor and day editor. He said to me once: "I regard my editor as a central telephone." He meant that the editor was not intended to be the chief maker or suggester of news; but the centre to which persons of special knowledge—or interest—should bring their ideas. Tom Marlowe, the then editor, had a certain genius as a sub-editor (in which perhaps he resembled Buckle, the editor of *The Times*); but in spite of his ability—and he would write well on occasion—he had one of the most urban minds I ever knew; and his chief migrations were from Carmelite House to the Savoy, and the Savoy to Carmelite House. Lord Northcliffe, who had a great belief in him as a sub-editor, did not intend that his urban interest should diminish the scope of the paper.

Northcliffe himself was not a countryman in essentials; nor was he, like his wife, an expert lover and maker of gardens; but he had a rare gift of observation. It served him in place of philosophy. He had no hearth of thought at which to warm his being and indeed had an active dislike of anything that suggested the abstract. He lived in the present, with a certain interest in the future, and was unanchored by tradition or traditional views. His feeling for the country was due not to temperament or upbringing and cast of mind, but to the scarcely credible acuity of his senses of sight and hearing. Most of the greater naturalists I have known have been long-sighted; and have extracted such pleasure from just seeing that they could not but be naturalists; and especially lovers of birds. It was told of a blind Englishman, who after half a life-time of darkness recovered his sight, that the chief wonder of the world to his new eyes was the flight of birds. "Why don't people make more fuss about it?" he asked. W. H. Hudson, Edmund Selous, with his more famous brother, Edward Grey, and George Dewar all had exceptional gifts of sight; and since long sight is more vulnerable as age increases than short sight, which often is benefited by the flattening of the eye, some of these men, necessarily forced into reading newspapers, very nearly fell into blindness. Lord Northcliffe, I should say, excelled them all in perfection of sight. He could, for example, read a small type notice in a shop window as he rushed past in his motor car. Such a gift was perhaps sharpened by his daily habit of "skimming," or casting a roving eye over a score of newspapers every morning before he got up. No

habit could have been worse for his long-sighted eyes; and at one time he was threatened, like his rival, Pearson, with utter blindness. A noted, but hardly intelligent, London oculist suggested an immediate operation; but his wise and energetic wife insisted on him hurrying off to a German specialist, who, after slow and careful examinations spread over several weeks, finally came to the just conclusion that his trouble was no more than extreme weariness of the optic nerve. Those long-sighted eyes that should have been looking at birds and the English scene had finally rebelled against this matutinal bullying, when they were forced to a series of quick changes of focus at short range.

Skimming was his ruin, both intellectually and optically. Nevertheless he began to discover more and more consciously what was the true function of such sight as his. Certainly his interest in the country as such continually grew and gave a deeper satisfaction.

Soon after I first knew him Northcliffe began to make a collection of the eggs of the birds found within the circle of his country home of Sutton Place. Its surroundings might have been made for birds. I have known a great many country houses of name and fame, but would put Sutton Place before them all in many particulars, and have watched there a surprising number of little events in natural history. One summer day, going out of the hall door (to play lawn tennis on the lawn) I caught sight of a weasel in a rose climbing the wall. The quick little animal fled upwards, left the rose, and began to mount the old pitted bricks. Once it almost fell, but still clung with one foot and finally disappeared into the gutter at the top. By the same door, while we were enjoying a quite noisy tea in the open air, two or three harvest mice—the smallest of our English mammals—came to seek for crumbs and I induced one to come to my hand. As I was sitting in the boughs of a spacious oak just the other side of the lawn one lovely May day, a curiously coloured brown patch in the kexes below caught my eye and I peeped for long before discovering that it was the back of a brooding partridge. She came off when I slithered down the trunk and revealed seventeen eggs, all of which were subsequently hatched. On the golf-links just over the garden fence, Lord Northcliffe and I watched a singularly perfect display of the partridge's standard shamming device. Instead of flying off she fluttered half on, half off, the surface of the grass till she reached a sloping golf green and slid down it on one side. You could have sworn that one wing was useless. It looked as if the retriever would catch her, but just in time she rose and flew off with the usual strong momentum that marks the bird's flight. The dog had been withdrawn about a hundred yards from the nest; but he had not been wholly fooled, and in the wise way of his

race went back again to the starting-point. Doubtless he would have found the nest if we had allowed him. The whole little incident, which enthralled Northcliffe, was a telling illustration of the technique of the struggle for life.

The rough garden where I had one of my few sights of an unhunted otter was a perfect example of the garden art. The stream had been artificially doubled, and almost all the natural trees and bushes left to flourish. It made one think that the garden of Eden might after all be all the better for the thorns and briars of its later development. One particular quick-thorn was completely grown over by a bramble and the umbrella always housed a nest or two. The plants that had been added, such as bamboo and Japanese maple, consented to a mutual relation with our native trees and were accepted by the birds as proper nesting sites. To walk from the old walled garden, with its red brick and terracotta Elizabethan house, past the rose-encircled water-pond, through the labyrinthine paths of the wild garden and back by the broad iris border was the most satisfying pilgrimage any lover of a garden could desire. Yet once I made this grand tour with a distinguished person who discoursed without ceasing from first to last on his seals of office and his panoply in London without (as I was careful to test) so much as noticing that he was not in a dusty law court. Lord Haldane's "spiritual home," as he said, may have been Göttingen; it certainly was not an English garden. His blindness to his surroundings seemed to me scarcely credible and, if credible, almost wicked. Doubtless my disinterest in his seals of office, if he had observed it, would have seemed to him a yet more intrinsic failing.

Lord Northcliffe was no gardener (though Lady Northcliffe was), but he had a real zest in the beauty of things and was conscious how lucky it was that his wife had a real genius for making a home, for garden design, for house furnishing, and not least as a hostess. How differently people regard scenes! I once set forth to show the garden to three Japanese visitors. As we came out of the garden door one of them looked at the long, broad, level lawn and ejaculated with fervour, "What a finish!" It appeared that his master interest was horse-racing. Lord Northcliffe himself grew rather tired of Sutton Place, because he fancied that he could not sleep there; and he would have tired sooner but for the golf-links. Happily he was told by a doctor that he must take more recreation or perish; so, after his wonted method of using the best available brains, he sent for James Braid, who had just won the championship. This tall, thoughtful Scotsman was shown the available fields, and indulged in one solitary walk round them, appearing to take little notice of anything.

He then adjourned to a study and drew a plan of the links, perfect in every detail. Harry Vardon and others came down to open them, and Vardon achieved the double circuit, for there were only nine holes, in 67 strokes—much to Braid's undisguised disgust. What he said was, "If he comes down again he'll reverse the figures." It was indeed an outrageous round. The most difficult and one of the longer holes (the one where we saw the shamming partridge) was done each time in three strokes. So impossible are the accomplishments of genius!

It is arguable that golf, in which thereafter he took a profound interest, saved Lord Northcliffe's health; but he must have risked damaging it at his first introduction. One of the guests in the house was Leo Maxse, who had as overwhelming a passion for lawn tennis as for the abuse of the politicians who differed from him. He seized on me for an afternoon of singles and we played seven long sets, for he was a born stonewaller. Before we started Lord Northcliffe, with a professional, who was thereafter always in attendance, had reached the first tee just the other side of the irises. Little Thompson, as he was always called, had arrived with his several boxes of balls and had arranged a company of small boys in an arc towards the first green. When Leo and I had finished our seventh set the pupil over the hedge was still driving balls from that tee and little Thompson was still propounding his maxims of tuition. I can hear his Scottish R's to this moment. "My Lor-r-rd. Think there's someone trying to steal your pocket-book and you not going to let him." Whether he imagined himself to be influencing what he thought the acquisitive instincts of his pupil I do not know, but he meant that the left arm should be pressed hard against the breast-pocket.

It may be that this sudden conversion to the game of golf, which is usually played in beautiful surroundings, helped to increase Northcliffe's rural bias. His papers in some degree echoed his own personal interests. Golf itself occupied more and more space; and one of the benefits that the public owes to Northcliffe is that of his appointment of Bernard Darwin to *The Times*. I was a fellow guest at Sutton with both Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, and Bernard Darwin on the eve of their enthronement and was asked to talk to them about the personalities of Printing House Square. What an essayist was found in Bernard Darwin! The natural and native merriment that goes with games found its way into literature almost for the first time. Athletics in the narrower sense have still to arrive. Has anything been written since Pindar giving adequate zest and drama to a race? Yet every year something good is written about sport; and among those who reached the level of literature was my friend and one-time neighbour, Hesketh Prichard, a romantic figure

with rare gifts both physically and in imaginative insight. Some of the places where he exercised his skill as a hunter leap to the eye, especially in his *Sport in Wildest Britain*. The humanitarian laments (or sometimes denials) that this is so; but it cannot be honestly denied that a very large proportion of sportsmen are in the truest sense nature-lovers. Walter Scott asked the question and answered it:

What is it steels the sportsman's heart?  
It is his conscious pride of art.

It was his "pride of art" that made Hesketh Prichard the pioneer of the sniping school in 1915 and an expert in camouflage. Many sportsmen, as they grow old themselves, become humanitarians, and most come to enjoy the scene and the company more than the sport itself. The almost classical example is Richard Jefferies. He was a pioneer in a class of book that did not become popular until his day. Comparatively early, and before he experienced any fall in vitality, he rose (or descended, if that is preferred) into sheer emotional mysticism. His publishers thought *The Story of My Heart* supreme. Some read it with a sense of pity and admiration strangely mingled. They can hardly decide whether it is a Book of Revelation or of raving. To Wordsworth nature took on a more sober colouring as he grew old. To Jefferies it swelled into a formless ecstasy, a visionary void like the less wonderful half of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. It is a book so unlike all others and so genuine in expression of mood, whether mystical or mad, that all who concern themselves at all with the English writers on nature must at least take note of it for all the extravagance of visionary rhetoric. Jefferies was a pioneer in a very precious form of literature; and if this product of almost morbid moods oversteps the bounds, there is no question about the beneficent influence of his earlier books. Even the professional humanitarians must acknowledge that, when in his "salad days" he wrote of the keepers and poachers in whose pursuits he had shared, he brought home with both beauty and simplicity the inner charm of wood and field. The two moods seem to me to coalesce into the closest union in his article on the "Pageant of Summer," but judgements vary. I introduced it once to a schoolmaster who was on the way to be a bishop; and all he said was, "How abominably written!" Well; Jefferies did not write well, as Gilbert White or Hudson wrote, but he felt well. He was "by the vision splendid on his way attended," always, everywhere, thanks to his early commerce with that Wiltshire scene which inspired Cobbett to more precise and less sentimental paeons.

Now both Cobbett and Jefferies were journalists, whose theme was the country. Lord Northcliffe's idea was that country subjects, like golf,

should be in the news, as the phrase goes, as well as in articles and books. Natural history of all sorts, the farm and the garden, were proper sources of news which people would be glad to read about and ought to read about. The idea was novel, in regard to daily newspapers, at any rate on the scale which he envisaged, and much further from realisation in evening newspapers.

Towards the end of last century a pleasant and learned writer and expert gardener called on all the editors he could think of with the offer of a series of garden articles. He was turned away with contumely on the ground that such subjects were not suitable for newspapers.

Only one editor talked to him with an open mind, Mr. Park of the *Star*. He was perhaps the most independent and original editor in London and famous as a trainer of journalists. He was certainly the most rural of editors in interest, and sometimes in dress. He appeared once at Sutton Place on the occasion of the reception and entertainment of a large group of overseas visitors in a large sombrero of sorts and appropriate clothes. J. L. Garvin, jumping to conclusions on plausible but insufficient grounds, went up to him and hailed him in effect as Mr. So-and-so of the Backwoods. "No," he said, "Mr. Park of the *Star*," and the two broke into uncontrollable laughter. Garvin at any rate has a magnificent and heart-whole gift of ringing laughter—and how few people laugh really well! It was, I think, on that occasion, or one like it, for Sutton Place was the frequent stage for such ceremonial entertainments, that Leo Maxse, who had been hammering away at the German danger in his *National Review*, received a little note, which he handed to me. It was from his host and contained five words: "The German Waiters have risen!"

Within a few months of the appearance of Davidson's garden articles in the *Star*, most of the editors in London were looking for garden experts to follow this popular lead. This was one sign of a sort of mental return to the land, which has grown steadily ever since. The more dangerous the threat to the loveliness of the English country scene, the larger grows the number of those who greatly desire to feel the breath of country airs. "Birds," someone said, "have a bigger circulation every year"; and those who cry, "O, for the wings," are as numerous in town as in country.

Northcliffe, it may be, foretasted this increasing vogue; but love of the country was in his bones. He had read, I discovered, what I had written weekly in the *Outlook* and had decided that the Open Air should blow weekly through the columns of the *Daily Mail*. When he began to sketch my terms of reference, the chance of living a country life without surrendering the fruits and fun of journalism, was opened, if the great man could be persuaded. So I argued that it was impossible to do this properly

and in an authentic way unless one lived in the country. It was necessary to be where the news was. Such an idea was abhorrent to the conventional editor and yet more the conventional day editor. His custom was to get to his desk at a tolerably early hour in the morning, and deal out subjects for the available staff. This enabled him to hand on to the editor and sub-editors who carried on his work into the night a rough scheme or pattern of the next day's news. The trouble was that a man so occupied, so "ribbed and paled in" by office and detail, was apt to grow narrower and narrower in his circle of ideas and interests; and the reporters, kept in leading strings to the office, suffered in like manner though in smaller degree.

With his usual freshness of judgment on any subject presented to him, Lord Northcliffe pondered for a few minutes on this little revolutionary suggestion, asked a few questions, and there and then accepted the idea in principle. A little later, when it became difficult to resist editorial demands for a daily interview, he wrote me a formal letter, on which I might at any time fall back, forbidding me in precise terms to come to London more than twice a week. Has any letter in my life been more gratefully received?

The country atmosphere grew rapidly; and more and more space was given to agriculture, gardening, natural history and rural life. Soon the work, especially the correspondence, grew so heavy that a second hand was needed; and I shared the work with P.W.D.I., or Percy Izzard; who has stayed there ever since. There is extant, I believe, a word Pwdism, to connote the particular style in which his "Country Day by Day" is written. The feature was actually invented by K. Robinson. Someone said of this standard country paragraph in the *Daily Mail* that it was the only thing in the paper with a soul in it—and the criticism perhaps had some justification. K. Robinson, who was one of the pioneers, had spent a good part of his life in India; and as editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* had come into close touch with Kipling, about whom he had many stories. It was indeed partly through his persuasion that Kipling was induced to leave India for London for the better development of his genius. The extent of his beneficent influence on Kipling's reputation may be inferred from his possession of a number of MSS. that he had induced Kipling to suppress! Perry Robinson, afterwards war correspondent to *The Times*, also came to know Kipling well; and the two had the most striking personal likeness I have ever known. "If we go about together one of us will have to wear a red wig," one of them said to the other.

## CHAPTER NINE



### A Little Farm



*A time there was ere England's griefs began  
When every rood of ground maintained its man.  
His best companions, innocence and health;  
And his best riches, ignorance and wealth.*

The Deserted Village    GOLDSMITH

IT was an incredible pleasure to be able—in spite of continuous and exacting work—to remain in our little crooked cottage in the valley of the Mimram, not so far from the region where Charles Lamb “walked and walked and walked,” and Isaac Walton talked and fished and watched the otter hunt. There is one lovely stretch, near Albury, where both recorded golden hours, where both put the rhythm of the English scene into the music of English words. Nearer still was Mackery End, the core of Lamb’s “hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire.” The county, unlike some others bordering on London, was saved from so-called development by its “feudal lords.” Lands and parks associated with the names of Salisbury, Verulam, Cowper, Desborough and Lytton, kept their hereditary status. None was sold for “development;” that grim word—till England was up in arms for the defence of its rural essence, and regional plans were in operation. So much of the shire was saved. The snipe continued to drum and nest in the pleasant valleys—even the woodcock breed in between Lea and Mimram; and at the nearer approaches to Cobbett’s Wen are still flushed such strange birds as the stint, redshank, and even the oyster-catcher. Everywhere the trees are magnificent. Doubtless in a perfectly regulated and regimented world every tree that grows stag-headed should be felled, unless it be so historic a relic as Queen Elizabeth’s oak in Hatfield Park. Some reformers may discover a symbol of the old evils of feudalism in the oaks up against Hatfield House. They are not only allowed to boast their antiquity: their threatened boughs are even held up by wooden props. But what a loss it would be to forego the spectacle of those immense boles, where the woodpeckers laugh and the rabbits burrow? Those who play cricket on the grass lawns, and the farmers who hold their annual show within a circle of such trees would hardly vote for their extinction. Nor perhaps would some of the most



ardent reformers. In this reference I cannot refrain from quoting a passage that I came upon with pleased astonishment in Mr. H. G. Wells' autobiography, for he is not generally regarded as a Tory or *Laudator Temporis Acti*.

"Now it is one of my firmest convictions that modern civilisation was begotten and nursed in the households of the prosperous, relatively independent people, the minor nobility, the gentry, and the larger bourgeoisie, which became visibly important in the landscape of the sixteenth century, introducing a new architectural element in the towns, and spreading as country houses and chateaux and villas over the continually more orderly countryside. Within these households, behind their screen of deer park and park wall and sheltered service, men could talk, think and write at their leisure. They were free from inspection and immediate imperatives. They, at least, could go on after thirteen thinking and doing as they pleased. They created the public schools, revived the waning universities, went on the Grand Tour to see and learn. They could be interested in public affairs without being consumed by them. The management of their estates kept them in touch with reality without making exhaustive demands upon their time. Many, no doubt, degenerated into a life of easy dignity or gentlemanly vice, but quite a sufficient number remained curious and interested to make, foster and protect the accumulating science and literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their large rooms, their libraries, their collections of pictures and "curios" retained into the nineteenth century an atmosphere of unhurried liberal enquiry, of serene and determined insubordination and personal dignity, of established aesthetic and intellectual standards. Out of such houses came the Royal Society, the *Century of Inventions*, the first museums and laboratories and picture galleries, gentle manners, good writing, and nearly all that is worth while in our civilisation to-day. Their culture, like the culture of the ancient world, rested on a toiling class. Nobody bothered very much about that, but it has been far more through the curiosity and enterprise and free, deliberate thinking of these independent gentlemen than through any other influences, that modern machinery and economic organisation have developed so as to abolish at last the harsh necessity for any toiling class whatever. It is the country house that has opened the way to human equality, not in the form of a democracy of insurgent proletarians, but as a world of universal gentlefolk no longer in need of a servile understratum. It was the experimental cellule of the coming Modern State."

Hatfield is the supreme type in itself as in historical association; and its nearness to that newest of things, the Welwyn Garden City, challenges

comparison of past and present. It was alleged with gusto that a sign-post was in existence between Hatfield and the Welwyn Garden City, which bore on its southern arm "The Way to Yesterday," and on the northern "The Way to Hell." Lord Salisbury himself told me that half the tale at any rate was true.

The Garden City may not be Paradise. It certainly is not Hell. It will develop and is to be welcomed, even ardently.

Most of the parks that have remained in private possession are of exceeding beauty, and the country people in their vicinity usually regard them not with jealousy but as a precious possession of the village. They are sanctuaries for bird and beast, as we should know who have combed them out for the pleasure of finding—and leaving intact—the birds' nests they preserve. Many a little stream is held up into a lake, where wildfowl gather, and all the neighbourhood skates in a bearing frost, or assemble to a bank holiday meet of the hounds in open weather. The loveliest shrubs from Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe, and even seeds of rare plants, collected in the Himalayas, are cultivated in these spacious gardens, as if they were the annexes of Kew. From these that greatest of travellers in plants, Mr. Kingdon Ward, was in part financed. Can it really be a good thing that such historic beauty should be cut into bits? At any rate those who belong to the generation that has enjoyed their neighbourhood will always rejoice in their good fortune. They have beautiful things to remember.

Many unusual activities resulted from the new emphasis on country things under Lord Northcliffe. One was the experiment of setting up an artisan or other working man in a small holding. The subject of small holdings was very much in the air; and for various reasons some new enterprise was desired by those responsible for the reputation of the *Daily Mail* which had recently lost a damaging libel action. One of the most enterprising—and theoretic—landowners in England was Mr. Christopher Turnor; and his land agent was Mr. C. S. Orwin, who was later to become head of the Institute of Agricultural Economy at Oxford University, and a leading exponent of a national system of husbandry. No man of my acquaintance, always excepting Sir Horace Plunkett, had so constant a zeal for the subject as Christopher Turnor. Someone betted a lady, who was to sit next to him at a dinner in London, that he would get to the subject of artificial manures before the meal was over, and the odds are that he won his wager. When I approached him he leapt at the suggestion that he should offer land for a small-holding and help to father the scheme. Very soon, thanks largely to his zeal, a homestead was built on a fourteen-acre field on the North Road, just outside Grantham, and

the tenancy of "the *Daily Mail* farm" thrown open to candidates. They proved to be legion. Sacks of letters reached the office, first from candidates (a huge proportion of whom were either 29 or 39 or 49 years of age, so afraid are people of a new decade), then from critics, mostly, but not all, kindly. How often I bicycled along the Great North Road to watch the progress of the little farm; and about four times out of five till autumn ended a corn bunting used to greet me with a gruff scolding as I turned the corner into the lane. This plump bird with larks and partridges seemed to have a particular pleasure in those fourteen acres. Perhaps the patch of lucerne (sown very close to avoid weeds, on the special instance of Mr. Turnor), the small grass paddock and the surrounding tilth gave them the variety they liked best.

An experiment carried on in the blaze of continuous publicity is under serious handicap, and the chief drawback is that from the economist's angle over-capitalisation is almost compulsory. You cannot adopt cheap makeshift methods in a place of public pilgrimage. Those who hold to the prejudice that such small farms are essentially uneconomic can make out a good case if the sum of labour by man, wife and children is reckoned at so much an hour and added to full interest on the cost of house, steading and equipment. There are few smallholders in any European country who receive a full wage per hour of work; but if they rejoice in the work and earn a decent living, the abstract financier's view is not of great concern.

The selected smallholder was Mr. Pougher, a Lincolnshire railway clerk, and for three years thousands followed his career. Before he was established I took him on a tour of some of the more interesting holdings in England, and among others we visited the fruit and flower farm of two very enterprising lady gardeners, who had started a French garden at Thatcham, near Newbury. The French gardens round Paris and in Holland round The Hague had long interested me; and this was a chance of bruiting abroad the facts of that amazingly intensive system. Accounts of "the golden soil" so stirred the public that the gardeners at Thatcham were overrun with visitors. They came in lorry loads, from all parts of England, and nearly worried to death the French expert. Soon after my visit I received an agitated letter saying that work was no longer possible. What were they to do? I telegraphed back, "Charge a £ entrance," and this I believe they did, successfully checking, though not stopping, the pilgrims, and netting a satisfactory sum.

The enthusiasm was such that French gardens were set going in a score of counties, by all sorts of people: by great ladies as at Poole; by army officers, as at Brighton; by clergymen, as at Christ Church; by market

gardeners, as at Evesham; even, indirectly, by golf clubs, as at Burhill. A purely technical book sold sixty thousand copies within a few weeks. Lord Northcliffe himself thought of turning one of his Sunday papers into an agricultural weekly called the "Golden Soil," and started a most excellent intensive garden in his Surrey home. Many of the gardens eventually faded away, thanks chiefly to the ignorance or laziness of the gardeners or their want of capital. My hope was to show how immense a weight of the best food a small plot of land can produce; and that what can be done in France and Holland can be done in England. Any land reform must be preceded by belief in the capacity of the land.

The smallholding was almost forgotten in the French garden, but it came into its own again. The railway clerk was a great worker, and was just established on a self-supporting basis when the three years' experiment ended and he became Mr. Christopher Turnor's tenant. He had grown to be a friend; and it was a real grief to hear a little later that he had died suddenly, died of a malady that had killed his father before him.

Among those interested in the smallholding was Sir Arthur Lee, later to become Lord Lee of Fareham, whom I had met a number of times. It was a surprise to many people during the war of 1914-1918 that Mr. Lloyd George chose him as one of his chief abettors in the Ministry of Food. They did not know of his deep interest in the land and belief in the value of rural surroundings. One of his fears for the future was that when a Labour Government came into power it would be wholly dominated by urban prejudices, since almost all the members would have been brought up in towns and in industrial occupations. The thought was continually in his mind. He himself had bought a house as full of the atmosphere of the country as a place could well be, though the county of Buckingham, thanks to its charm and nearness to London, has been grievously sub-urbanised. Chequers lies in a green valley cut off by green hills from outside traffic. To look at the warm colour of the country house, much more to walk in the most English garden, is to be instantly subdued to the spirit of the place. The first morning of my first visit there my host took me to pay his usual morning visit to a peculiarly tame tit sitting on a dozen eggs or so in the hole of an apple-tree just outside the window. We talked of Bismarck who, during a crisis in German affairs, was found with a watch in his hand counting the number of times in an hour the parent tits brought food to their young. Later in the day, as we leant over a gate watching the polled cattle, Sir Arthur told me a deep secret: he was thinking of presenting Chequers to the nation. His dream was this, that if you could insure that the rulers of England, whoever they were, and however urban, should spend the quieter

intervals of their time there in the green valley among brooding cattle, in a peaceful garden remote from people and crowds, then you would exert a permanent influence for good, help to restore the perspective of minds confused by the hurly-burly of Westminster, and give more depth and constancy to the whole body politic. Sir Arthur Lee developed his dream with genuine zest and imagination. Just thirteen years after this vision of the future was interpreted to me, over the gate behind which the cattle were pastured, a picture appeared in the public press of Ramsay MacDonald standing in plus fours by that same gate looking at the cattle with the air of a farmer proprietor. As a man of imagination he was quite certainly absorbing some of that spirit of the country that has been the leaven of wisdom in a long succession of our statesmen. The gift of Chequers had a great idea behind it; and the idea was realised within a surprisingly short space of time.

Every year with great regularity, I paid a visit to a yet more ardent disciple of the philosophy of the land. My duties took me to the Dublin horse-show, where you may see more good hunters and steeplechasers than anywhere in the world. What is there in the Irish soil that produces bone in both men and horses? An astonishing number of the best jumpers and hammer-throwers among human athletes, in Britain as in America, bear Irish names; and the number of foreign visitors and eager buyers at the Dublin horse-show is evidence enough that Europe has a belief in the bone of the Irish horse. For the occasion of this show, though most of his guests took no sort of interest in horses, Sir Horace Plunkett always entertained a house-party at his most original house just outside Dublin. An autobiography by his cousin, Lady Fingal, who acted as hostess for these parties, records the charming walks we took from that base among the granite of the Wicklow hills, sparkling with mica discs. She and other of Sir Horace's friends and relations used to lament that his monomania—it was hardly less—on the subject of agricultural co-operation had almost killed the native gaiety and humour conspicuous in his early days. He became a man of one idea; but it did not really destroy his humour and charm; if you knew him well; and it certainly left a corner for his pleasure in playing golf. He had an ingenious little course in his garden, and perhaps twice in a morning would interrupt his work and mine for a hurried round with niblick and putter. Once I stayed with him for a meeting of the British Association at which I was to read a paper on French gardening. Sir Horace was chairman of the sub-branch of agriculture; and he made at least one notable hit. The debate was on the difficulties facing Irish agriculture, and a little waspish politician named Russell used the occasion to make a venomous political and

personal assault on the chairman. When he sat down Sir Horace, whose temper was always under perfect control, rose and said with well-articulated precision: "The spirit of the speech to which we have just listened is an admirable example of the chief difficulty with which agriculture has to contend in Ireland." The rest of the meeting was quite peaceable and scientific.

In the course of his campaign for co-operation which became world-famous (as I was to discover in both Newfoundland and in New York), a group of Sir Horace's admirers presented him with a spacious headquarters for the movement in Merrion Square in Dublin. It was called Plunkett House. It was used as the editorial office of the weekly paper of the movement and the throne of the editor, one of the strangest characters of his age. He was known in the early days as "A-E" to a small circle of admirers as a mystic poet and painter. When Sir Horace, with no little insight, decided that he was the man he wanted, he asked leave of the draper, in whose shop A.E. worked, if he could spare him. The man replied that he could find fifty men as good tomorrow. Probably he was right. The very last thing A.E. cared about was clothes. Even when he came up to dine with the house party at Kilteragh, it did not occur to him to brush up, much less to change his clothes. His thoughts were concentrated on other things; and he had an undoubted touch of genius. Week after week he converted pigs and poultry into the real stuff of literature in the weekly paper of the co-operative movement. Such human essays on such subjects have not been written before or since; and his talk was better than his writings. His editorial sanctum at the top of Plunkett House was frescoed by the editor with pictures from Irish legend, many of them in a form of perspective wholly original and fitted to oddities in the room. One with great cranes in a marsh particularly remains in my memory. Sir Horace's own house was full of his paintings, a little more conventional, but not the least like other people's pictures. They were all conspicuous for a certain spacious "wash of air."

A.E. was also an effective speaker. He had the idiom of the people, the soft voice and easy idiom that mark the Irish, and would persuade the people to join the co-operative scheme by describing in exact detail how a sow would produce so many pigs, saleable at such-and-such a price at such-and-such a date, and how the pound or two first subscribed would thereupon mount to two or four pounds. No one can be more practical when he wishes than your born mystic. I went to a number of co-operative meetings near Belfast as well as in Southern Ireland; and was always impressed by the rhetorical neatness and point of the speeches, whether

made by the less educated of the company or some highly-educated Roman Catholic priest.

Such co-operative effort succeeded wonderfully in Ireland and failed in England largely because the Irish, like the old English kings, were "stark to traitors." If any member dealt outside his society he was boycotted or worse. An uncle of mine started such a society in the Midlands, under good prospects, but presently his money was lost and the society ruined because the members would continually make private deals, and the factory would suddenly be left without material. When a defaulting member was reported, the committee simply said: "O, poor fellow; it was quite natural if he could get a better price elsewhere, that he took it." As Goering said to Nevile Henderson, "You English are not sufficiently brutalised."

This Irish co-operation and its author had perhaps their greatest reputation on the American continent. Sir Horace was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt; and it is on record that when the President was engaged in his great campaign for "Conservation of national resources," he asked Sir Horace for a battle-cry. On the spur of the moment Sir Horace produced a maxim, afterwards iterated and reiterated without mercy: "Better farming, better business, better living;" and Roosevelt seized on it and sometimes enlarged on it in a manner that did not wholly please the author. He said to me once, a little sadly, but with his usual touch of humour: "I find that you have to be very careful in your choice of megaphone." Later, when in Newfoundland, I was asked to meet a number of persons eager to extend agriculture in that most unagricultural island; and the very first questions put to me took most of the time. "Tell us," they said, "all about Sir Horace Plunkett and his Irish co-operation."

A good deal later the United States began to hear also of A.E., not so much as a farmer or journalist, but as a mystic and a poet, a man who could see fairies when he wanted to and produced paintings and poetry of a strange originality. He began to enjoy a vogue a few years before his death and made a very successful journey as lecturer in the United States. His poetry, like a good deal of Irish poetry, is hard to take hold of, and he was not immune from grammatical lapses. Sometimes his crowd at Plunkett House would help him. One poem, above others, though it is not a favourite of the anthologists, has always seemed to me of supreme merit; and it is worth quoting and remembering if only as a creed and a criticism of the cardinal weakness of much South Irish literature and philosophy. Its title has perhaps discouraged the public: "On behalf of some Irishmen not followers of tradition." It concludes:

We are less children of this clime  
 Than of some nation yet unborn  
 Or empire in the womb of time.  
 We hold the Ireland in the heart  
 More than the land our eyes have seen,  
 And love the goal for which we start  
 More than the tale of what has been.  
 The generations as they rise  
 May live the life men lived before,  
 Still hold the thought once held as wise,  
 Go in and out by the same door.  
 We leave the easy peace it brings:  
 The few we are shall still unite  
 In fealty to unseen kings  
 Or unimaginable light.  
 We would no Irish sign efface,  
 But yet our lips would gladlier hail  
 The firstborn of the Coming Race  
 Than the last splendour of the Gael.  
 No blazoned banner we unfold—  
 One charge alone we give to youth,  
 Against the sceptred myth to hold  
 The golden heresy of truth.

The poem was, I believe, in some small degree a co-operative effort. A.E.'s friends weighed in with criticism and suggestion. Sir Horace at any rate was such a votary of co-operation that he may have wished to recommend it to the poets as well as the husbandmen! If only the Irish majority had been of A.E.'s school!

Ireland, Ireland: how fair an island it is, too fair to be distressful. What harbours, what rivers, what lakes and hills, what rich pastures! An uncle of mine, whose life was largely spent in shooting and fishing, though he was successful both in business and in farming, said when Mr. Lloyd George first proposed his revolutionary land reform that the Irish were the one people who would have none of it; and acting on his belief he secured a house on the West Coast of Ireland and a mile or two of salmon fishing on the Drowes in County Leitrim. His theory was—and he was full of theories—that it was an early river, so he would go forth and flog its waters for as much as eight hours a day from January onwards. To check the fish on their raging rush to the breeding grounds he would suspend a piece of rotting fish in mid-stream, but in spite of all he continued to flog in vain for a number of months, and indeed years. The river, though of some considerable size and depth, almost vanishes



among the stones at its approaches to the pebbly shore; yet in this dissipated trickle great salmon would struggle up almost like eels; and on one occasion, as the uncle was watching the difficult ascension his old Newfoundland retriever found the temptation more than he could resist and attempted to pick up one of the big fish in his mouth. Dogs, or at any rate Newfoundland dogs, no less than cats, take kindly enough to fish, and one great dog trainer, who was Sydney Holland to a huge circle before he was Lord Knutsford, trained one of them to land his fish in lieu of a net or gaff.

Included in the unexploited wealth of West Ireland is the abundance of lobsters. A young editor of *The Times* (whom I had known as a boy and helped in his first approaches to journalism) delighted in a holiday spent at Black Sod Bay; and found that the lobster fishing was obstructed by the difficulty of carrying the catch to market across the bay. He thereupon bought an old naval launch for a song, fitted her with a motor and handed her over to a local innkeeper. The industry began to boom, and the boat began to make money as an engine of transport for man as well as lobster. In one of his letters reporting progress the innkeeper apologised humbly for one item in the account. He had charged only £2 for conveying a gentleman across the bay. He did not discover till afterwards that he was a Government official, or, of course, he would have charged £4! There spoke authentic Ireland. A few years later the boat came to a mysterious end, as did a larger boat of my uncle's on its way from Loch Swilly to an English harbour.

In West Ireland, where I have watched the lobster fishers and had passage in their boats, the crayfish and most of the lobsters are sold to the French. Since the ships arrive at wide intervals the bulk of the catch is kept (for an indefinite period) in crates anchored in the sea, and the men declare that however long they are imprisoned the lobsters never lose weight, though no food is provided. The long narrow canvas-covered boats, made on the spot, are driven with great skill and courage into the rougher seas without mishap. The men are subdued to that they work in. As you watch one of these inverted craft being carried on the back of several men who are visible only as to the lower leg, you can scarcely avoid a comparison with some crawling shell-fish or mystic monster of the deep. The fishermen must earn a small return. At any rate the whole locality is pretty well emptied of its active male population when peas, potatoes, and such like are ready to be gathered on English farms. Our bigger farmers delight in Irish labour (as New York householders in Irish "help") for two reasons. The men work well and are content with humbler living quarters than most English workers would

endure. Enough money is earned in such intensive piecework to keep the workers through the thinnest of Irish winters.

The atmosphere of that lonely Irish coast has strange effect on body and mind. Consumption is commoner than in the most crowded of cities; and though the men are virile and athletic, perhaps beyond the normal, a sort of lethargy is apt to pervade them, a lethargy that wholly vanishes in alien surroundings. I have found something similar, in spite of the contrast in racial origin, both in Skye and Jura.

In all these western regions flourishes peculiarly the most savage of all the birds that fly, the Greater Black-backed Gull. One of the strangest and grimmest events in natural history that ever I witnessed was the sudden aimless onset of one of these savages on a passing heron. A pair of these inoffensive birds were flying together parallel with the coast at about three hundred yards interval; and, as we watched, a single gull flew out from the cliff below us, charged straight at the nearest heron and threw it into the sea. The gull at once returned to the cliff and the single heron flew on.

By Loch Swilly, before the eyes of my fishing uncle, a pair of black-backs succeeded in the seemingly impossible ambition of robbing a seal of its prey. The moment that the seal, carrying a fish in its mouth, appeared on the surface, the two gulls mobbed it savagely, almost hitting it with their beaks. After a number of attempts at evasive action the seal finally let go his prey, and while one bird continued the mobbing tactics the other picked up the fish and made away with it. The birds seem to have an inexplicable knowledge of the whereabouts of food. Within a moment or two of the firing of a gun they will appear as from nowhere. If the gun is a punt gun—and punt gunning is one of the sports of West Ireland—a number of the gulls, though they are more solitary than other species, will collect suddenly, and at once dive at any wounded bird, using their powerful beaks like spears and driving them along the body of the duck. It is curious that they seek out the wounded rather than the dead birds. "Nature, red in tooth and claw," may be less cruel than she sometimes seems.

Ireland is a sportsman's, but not a politician's, Paradise. I was once asked by the editor of the *Daily Mail* to go over there for a few weeks and on my return report on anything that struck me. It proved a delightful holiday, and by way of journalistic business I determined to ask every and any type of Irishman that I met what he thought Ireland wanted. The questions were quite vain. No priest, labourer, farmer, shopkeeper, fisherman, politician, town-dweller, or country-dweller contributed anything that could be interpreted into a constructive sugges-

tion. Out of the spate of destructive criticism delivered against all sorts of persons, Irish as well as English, not a point of solid land appeared. What seemed to me the cardinal trouble was that in a land of very small-holders, who can support life tolerably well, but cannot make money as such, the young and vigorous sons toil for their parents almost without pay or hope. They are primed for any change, even a bad one. Rebellion, so long as it was backed by money, by real gold from across the Atlantic, gave to life all the charm and excitement it had previously missed. And the sum was very large. One American who had come over to distribute the money told me that he had control of £15,000 a month; and he was one only of several agents.

## CHAPTER TEN



### Some English Chroniclers



*The thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learned of friends; and gentlemen,  
In hearts at peace under an English heaven.*

The Soldier    RUPERT BROOKE

*Here of a Sunday morning  
My love and I would lie  
And see the coloured counties  
And hear the larks so high  
Above us in the sky*

A Shropshire Lad    A. E. HOUSMAN

WHAT a Paradise is England, infinite in variety, cloistered in calm and quiet, even at the edge of the turbulent seas that its buttressed coasts defy. The work of man abides through the centuries and has quite tamed and humanised the surface of the land; yet keeps it true to its ancient charm and conserves the delight of its wilder denizens. The little fields are edged with thorns and briars that create the garden of England as they destroyed the garden of Eden. The dark and lonesome terrors of the old forests that once smothered the surface are transformed into spinneys and woods, where dappled light and shade draw sweet-singing birds from the distant south and make homes for flowers as sweet in scent as in hue. Thus today the floor of the ousted forest surpasses the most precious garden. Alien trees exult in their exile and grow as consonant to the new country as their native neighbours. The very sky above the island is so toned to the scene it roofs, that visitors from our antipodes are wonder-struck by the form and colour of the clouds. The humble houses, often built of stone and straw and wood and brick got from the neighbouring land, seem to have grown straight out from the soil; and harbour communities still as true to the spirit of the place as a river to its bed.

They say we must lose all this peculiar grace; and indeed much that was best was sacrificed to the internal combustion engine. The fear grew so real about the opening of the new century that an army of defence was organised, calling itself the Council for the Preservation of Rural England.

One of the first acts of the chief founder, Mr. Patrick Abercrombie, Professor of Civics at Liverpool University, was the making of a new sort of book. I was introduced to the creation of the first of these by an invitation from Lady Milner, who lived at one of the most English spots within England, Sturry Court by Canterbury. She wished to give the lovely old house, and yet lovelier and larger barn—perhaps the finest in England—to the Royal Horticultural Society as a memorial to her husband; and I have always regretted that my subsequent approach to the society was not successful. Lord Milner, who when free from politics was an ardent and even learned botanist as well as scholar, had designed the garden delightfully and Blomfield built in it a garden house well fitted to the surroundings. It would have been an invaluable possession for the R.H.S.

My visit had a second object. A fellow guest was Mr. Abercrombie who was preparing the first of the regional surveys which were soon to multiply. Kent, the garden of England, was threatened by the development of Kentish coal, and the one defence against the ugly inhumanity of the industrial revolution was to plan a sort of garden city, before the muddled building of miners' dwellings began. Lord Milner, just before his death, had worked hard to this end. He once said that of all the jobs he had faced in life (even at the eve of the Boer war and at the crisis of 1918 in France), by far the most difficult was to persuade some fourteen Rural District Councils to consent to the formation and adoption of a common scheme that must necessarily overflow local boundaries! These surveys—ample volumes with spacious maps and diagrams—were a new sort of rural literature; and the later books, especially that about the Penn country and the Thames on either side of Cliveden, contained passages that put some of their contributors almost in the class of a Hudson or a White. They have exerted a beneficent influence. The Thames will flow sweetly "in perpetuity" below the wooded cliffs of Cliveden and the not less lovely domain belonging to that great Englishman, Lord Desborough. Both he and Lord Astor have "dedicated" their homes to the love of England. It is well to remember also that the movement they have most generously promoted was set going by the makers of the Surveys. The modern Domesday, unlike the old, concerns beauty rather than finance.

A colleague of mine on the *Daily Mail*, Valentine Williams, whose father was a pillar of Reuter's Agency, has written a very bright and vivid record of his life and called it *The World of Action*. It tells of his share, as onlooker and in the war as actor, in great events in most of the countries of Europe. Only as successive war-correspondents in France did our paths converge. His life lay in capitals, mine in the country; and, in spite

of much travelling, chiefly in the intensive observation of the English country. In fulfilment of the task set me of bringing the bréath of the country into English newspapers I had every chance to make acquaintance with essential scenes in England and Wales, as he of visiting European capitals; and the variety of our island is, like Cleopatra's beauty, infinite, as much beyond the scope of a common picture as the various countries of Europe. Even a single county, say, Berkshire, contains no typical scene. There is the Thames valley that has been sunk between high downs. Wood and marsh and mead all fringe those lovely streams, the Kennet and the Pang. Old Windsor Forest extended to Aldermaston, as its great oaks announce, and the game of golf was first played—Blackheath only excepted—on the glorious common at Newbury. Racehorses gallop over a high and level course along the Fair Mile above Juniper Hollow. All these and more compose the definition of Berkshire. A whole book about Berkshire was written in the "Highways and Byways" series; and the author in the excess of his material clean forgot the Bath Road whose course is fathoms deep in history. How, then, shall anyone attempt to paint a picture of England, though it is but a miniature in extent? The vertebrae of its most salient scenery are made of carboniferous limestone; but they have nothing in common with the chalk that is proclaimed by the cliffs of Dover or the granite that defends Cornwall, or the softly rising land that is adding to the girth of England by Rye or Sutton Bridge, or the blackland of Cambridgeshire and West Lancashire farms. The features below as above ground have so little likeness that no generalisation will ever be possible. That good Englishman, Lord Avebury, once had the hardihood to call a book *The Scenery of England*; but did ever any book fall shorter of its title? It was little more than a geological textbook; and the beauty of England lies first in its humanised surface. It has been well argued by that great land reformer, Sir George Stapledon, that the test of a nation's culture and civilisation is its treatment of the surface of its land.

So are we baffled by England; and yet—or perhaps and therefore—no country has a literature that so essentially tells the influence of the country on the mind and character of its people. Our civilisation is the most urban, our inner mood the most rural. A German historian long ago pointed this out; and the passage is worth reiteration. "*The Compleat Angler* and the *Natural History of Selborne* are types of a style of literature peculiar to this country. In these classical productions all are introduced into the nursery of English thought, poetry—nay, science itself."

It is remarkable how the two books that the German selected are thought of together, in spite of their unlikeness and difference of dates.

One of the best of the old-fashioned editors of White begins his introduction by noting "the singular parallel in the popularity of the two old books. . . . The cause of the esteem in which the two books are held is mainly the same. Honest, manly and godly in their tone, simple and clear in their style, with no ostentation, clearness and accuracy of observation in the subjects which each particularly affected, and with the charm of enthusiasm for the glorious 'out-of-doors,' they are models for all succeeding writers on kindred subjects."

Both men were under the spell of the English scene. It got into their style, colouring it as our misty airs may colour the landscape. Selborne itself could subdue anyone, as it subdued White, the Oxford scholar, who luckily for the world failed to be elected Provost of Oriel, subdued him to its English spirit. Even Grasmere is scarcely a rival.

Visiting Grasmere one day (to test the assertion that the author of the plaque carvings in commemoration of Wordsworth contained a botanical "howler"), it occurred to me how much more serious such an error would have seemed to White, who was a naturalist, than to Wordsworth who was not. The sculptor has carved on a commemorative plaque a greater celandine (which is a poppy) instead of a lesser celandine (which is a buttercup of sorts); and that humble flower was regarded by the poet with ingenuous pride as almost a botanical discovery. Both men lie in worthy scenes near the southern and northern extremities of England, as do Hudson and Richard Jefferies, buried side by side in the same Midland churchyard; but the Selborne scene is the most English of all. It is as unforgettable as the classical book that immortalises it. You may be disappointed in your first sight of Niagara or Honolulu or Paris. You must be satisfied with Selborne if you walk about, like the eighteenth-century rector, on your "stumps."

The Hanger, the zigzag, the church, the magnificent mountain, the pendent woods, the view down the river valleys, the deep lanes, the very wheatears on the downs remain very much as White saw them, an immortal epitome of the things that make England lovely and lovable in partial eyes. Selborne has the qualities that belong to both hill and vale; and other virtues in the soil evoke the true gifts of the chalk. It favours two trees above others, the beech and the yew; and up the slope of that Hanger (which was almost an *alter ego* to White) you see aspects of the beech rare in other places. Up the slope and about the Zig-zag the beeches nurse one another into an "O altitudo," as Sir Thomas Browne would have said. As the slope flattens into a tableland, single beech trees expand into the canopied pillar we are familiar with. One reason why the beech is so splendid in figure is that it allows no under-

growth. A beech wood is an aisle and transept without pews and other obstructions. The columns are seen for what they are, and have this superiority over pillars that the pedestal is organic and is decorated with its own gradations and flutings. They do not suffer undergrowths as kindly as the immense yews in the churchyard endures the rustic seat about it. As an example of the impress of particular trees, C. P. Scott, of the *Manchester Guardian*, the greatest editor of his day, wrote to me in his old age, to beg that I would rediscover for him a particular beech tree that he had once seen in the New Forest.

The beech grove at Selborne is splendid, but the place is too hospitable to permit of a monopoly. While on one side of the path, you mark the usual absence of small things under the massed beech trees, on the other the most apparent marvel is the groundwork of seedlings from ash and sycamore and other trees. They proclaim the congenial soil and clime. The bluff of the Hanger (and the watchfulness of the National Trust) encourages them. The whole region is clothed by natural compulsion with trees, single and in groups and in woods. And tinier things are germane to the grounds thereabouts, not least the wood sorrel, whose leaves are more shapely and delicate than clover or shamrock, and the sanicle, most fastidious of its kind. In few places do the wild rose swing out into such bold curves.

A place so commingled of wood and glade, of tree and undergrowth, of hill and valley, of shelter and freshness, must needs be a paradise of birds; and not even his archaeology, his topography, his tree, or his tortoise delighted Gilbert White as the birds delighted him. His very words are winged: they rise to a music quite absent from some of the letters when he writes of the wood-wren and even the rook and starling. He was always the scholar, often the man of science. He was only the poet when he heard the songs of birds. His birds are safe "in perpetuity" for their favourite part of the hill is now a permanent sanctuary, though anyone may walk there, under the National Trust, an inviolable fragment. The neighbourhood, like parts of Norfolk, creates naturalists, though the birds of Hants belong to the villages and of Norfolk to the wild. When you begin to descend from the South Downs (where the wheatears scuttle about like mice in the neighbourhood of their buried nests) and travel along the Meon valley all conditions prevail that give most of the small birds and many plants the ideal that they seek. They like trees to sing in and the lowest scrub to nest in, resembling the lark, though their aspiration is lower, in their fidelity to "the kindred points of heaven and home." Yet they do not like big woods. Trees that always avoid the dark density of woods are one mark of this region; and under



their lee flourish those low shrubs and plants that the warblers love best. The chiffchaff playing the cicada in the trees looks down on the green roof over her nesting home. Some of the humbler houses near the foot of the Hanger are almost like nests, so hung over are they by boughs, so persuasively inset after the fashion that Morland painted. I suppose that the inner charm of the *Natural History of Selborne* is the sense of quiet enjoyment that it breathes in unconscious simplicity. The whole world did "contract into a span" when the old parson saw or heard—and he had singularly acute eyes and ears—some newly-arrived birds. "The grasshopper lark began his sibilous note in my fields last Saturday. Nothing can be more amusing"—a wonderful word—"than the whisper of this little bird, which seems to be close at your ear, is scarce any louder than when a great way off. Had I not been a little acquainted with insects, and known that the grasshopper kind is not yet hatched, I should have hardly believed that it was not a *Locusta* whispering in the bushes. . . . I was obliged to get a person to go to the other side of the hedge where it haunted, and then it would run, creeping like a mouse, before us for a hundred yards together, through the bottom of the thorns; yet it would not come into fair sight; but in the morning early, and when undisturbed, it sings on the top of a twig, gaping and shivering with its wings. . . ." That is the way to write, so that the delight of the eyes shines through the picture. Thomas Huxley, pleading for natural history in education, once said that there were writers so full of style—and emptiness—that you could "almost mistake their sensuous caterwaulings for the music of the spheres." The eyes and ears give music deeper in human reality. They are the surest of all inspirers of style. Out of the Hanger at Selborne is bred a philosophy as deep as Wordsworth discovered at Tintern, though no one was less poetic or metaphysical than White; and the less said about his poetry the better. He was just an Englishman absorbed in a bit of England.

As a boy the hymn—

New every morning is the love  
Our wakening and uprising prove

had a surprising appeal. To the very young it seems (which doubtless it is not) great poetry; but I have thought since that the distinction of a countryman's life, however humble a disciple of White or Walton, is the feeling of newness in every new day. It comes perhaps from observance of the subtle gradation of the seasons. The year has no great event in England. Its excitement is continuous, broken, only by the night. Every day may reveal such an episode as White found "amusing," some

new light in the sky or flower of the field or bird in the air or birth on the farm.

A certain bishop once said that if he was late in going on some mission or other he felt that he did not meet the people in the street whom God had meant him to meet. In the same sort of mood the countryman, even into advanced old age, often feels that if he does not go out of doors when the light, even of the moon, invites he may miss something that he ought to see. A dainty little lyric on the theme has been written by the farmer poet of America, Robert Frost, a countryman if ever there was one.

The way a crow  
Shook down on me  
The dust of snow  
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I had rued.

So it is. The size of things does not make their importance, at any rate their subjective importance; and that is the most important importance.

Gilbert White was happy. Wordsworth was happy. Contrariwise, the poets who wrote about the country round about White's date had a certain gift for discovering unhappiness. Perhaps they were influenced by that most urban of English writers, Dr. Johnson, who, indeed, himself wrote a few lines both of Crabbe's "The Village" and Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village." Yet both had a country sense, Crabbe because he was a botanist, Goldsmith because his father was a country parson. The *Vicar of Wakefield* (which is supreme in art and charm, as Goethe acknowledged) has an opening chapter that is as full of the savour of the country—though it was Irish country—as any passage in our literature; but an odd similarity between Crabbe and Goldsmith (whose lives overlapped into Gilbert White's) is that the two poems begin with the charm of the village, but at once fall back into a wallowing in its melancholy. Crabbe seems so to desire to indulge in gloom that he apologises for being forced by facts to make some preliminary confessions of its joys:

No longer, Truth, though shown in verse, disdain  
But own the Village Life a life of pain;  
I too must yield that oft amid these woes  
Are gleams of transient Mirth and hours of sweet repose.

And earlier, as an introduction to a singularly gloomy picture, he makes the obviously grudging concession:

I grant indeed that Fields and Flocks have charms  
For him that gazes or for him that farms.

Perhaps the difference lay not only in temperament but in the rough coast of East Anglia and the snug valley of Hampshire. Selborne was a happy village in White's day, unaffected by the evils of enclosure or the threats of invasion. It was a "Sweet Auburn" not so much unlike the popular passage that opens Goldsmith's poem. Even our latest historian, Arthur Bryant, could not keep his hands off it, allowing that Goldsmith "painted from a still living model, the English hamlet as our forbears knew it. It was something common to England alone:

How often have I loitered o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endeared the scene  
How often have I paused on every charm,  
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,  
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topped the neighbouring hill,  
The hawthorn bush with seats beneath the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers made.

Both Crabbe and Goldsmith are excelled in the country sense by poor, mad, domestic, humorous, hare-loving Cowper, who felt with almost a Wordsworth's delight, the pleasures of observing the rather pedestrian beauties of the despised shires of Huntingdon and Bedford; and could write of them in the best letters preserved to our literature and in verse of a purity of diction so simple as to conceal its own worth.

While Goldsmith—for the most part a Londoner throughout his writing days—followed Crabbe as a Jeremiah in heroic couplets, Cowper was of the Gilbert White school, babbling in pleasant blank verse of the pleasures of park and garden and rural walks. Perhaps my own particular delight in the river Ouse prompts a too ready admiration of Cowper's lines.

Here Ouse, slow wandering through a level plain  
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er  
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course  
Delighted. There, fast-rooted in his bank  
Stand, never overlooked, our fav'rite elms  
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;  
While far beyond and overthwart the stream  
That, as with molten glass inlays the vale,

The sloping land recedes into the clouds;  
 Displaying on its varied side the grace  
 Of hedgerow beauties numberless, square tow'r,  
 Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
 Just undulates upon the list'ning ear;  
 Groves, heaths and smoking villages remote.  
 Scenes must be beautiful which daily viewed  
 Please daily, and whose novelty survives  
 Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years.

He touches on in those last lines a secret I would corroborate. Seen daily, or daily remembered, a certain square tower and two great sycamores have survived the scrutiny of at any rate three-score years without losing their power to seem as beautiful as ever. He is harder to appreciate when he associates his love of rural life with a sort of petulant, almost angry, abuse of the town. As a comment on the old Latin dictum, which he translates, "God made the country and man made the town," he says to his imaginary townsman: your songs

Confound our more harmonious notes. The thrush departs  
 Scared, and th' offended nightingale is mute.  
 There is a public mischief in your mirth.

The outburst is perhaps rather ludicrous; but he rises within sight of Shakespeare's English, as not seldom, in that last sentence; and now and again anticipates the philosophy of Wordsworth himself. Such passages make pardonable even the petty domesticities that intervene. It might be plausibly argued that the love of the simplicities of nature, which seems to be rising to a peak in the prose literature of our days, was sown in 1720. In that year White was born, and in the very next year William Collins; and by the general consent of the critics the two lighted a new fire, or at any rate re-illuminated a sinking one. Collins' *Ode to Evening* and his other to *Simplicity* are pioneers in our poetry, as White's *Selborne* in our prose. They did what Virgil with greater genius did in that burst of glorious poetry at the end of the Second Georgic: "*Me vero primum*" and the rest, which perhaps inspired Cowper to his contrast of town and country.

Although no writer has so intensively immortalised one small place as Gilbert White, just a few circles of land have been studied yet more thoroughly by both students and naturalists. Two of them are Scolt Head in Norfolk and Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire. Most of England is man-made in country as in town. More than half the beauty of its inland scenes consists of fields, neatly contained by hedgerows, of home-

steads and villages and gardens and planted trees. Even Wicken Fen owes something to the work of man on its surface. The sedges have been cut, the rides kept clear and allowed to carry the queer sugared posts of the moth-ers, who flock to the village from many quarters. Yet essentially it has been untouched throughout historical times; and is almost unique in this regard. It trails clouds of glory. Quite recently every attribute of it has been subjected to the closest scrutiny by men of science from Cambridge who have recorded all their findings—in geology, in history, and in natural history. Not an inch has been unsurveyed by shrewd scientific observers. The same has been done at the sandy peninsula of Scolt Head.

It has been said that there are more naturalists to the square yard in Norfolk than anywhere in the world, and there are families of hereditary naturalists, such as the Gurneys and the Buxtons. Was it not the best of the Buxton naturalists who made a sensation at the League of Nations in Geneva, by abstracting a fire-escape in order to use it as an observation post for a honey-buzzard's nest? The most ardent and constructive of them all, at least among my personal acquaintances, was Sidney Long, a Norwich doctor who founded the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust, and gradually bought or secured a long line of sanctuaries. Thanks to his energy and interest every secret of the headland has been penetrated, even the nature of the rise and fall of the tides. Solitary observers—the most famous a woman—have lived the year round in the hut-like dwelling in the sand and watched the coming and going of bird and butterfly; and catalogued every herb. Just as Gabriel Oak, the shepherd in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, grew consciously aware of the swing of the stars, as he tended his lambs at night, so in such a place as this lonely Norfolk shore you find yourself in the swing of great migratory movements, else little known and rarely seen and felt. Thousands upon thousands of white butterflies will fill the air like snowflakes, all moving with purposeless purpose in one direction hour after hour, it may be day after day. For myself I have stood with a solitary amateur watcher near the sea's edge and become slowly aware that all about us were small birds, running and making short flights, all in one direction, on and on under the impulse of an autumn desire for the South. Warbler and wheatear both seemed to move in desultory fashion, but expressed purpose and direction nevertheless. You were conscious of the drift until the twilight darkened and the only visible birds were the tall herons standing motionless in the gleam of the mere.

No man that ever I heard of had a more fit memorial raised to him than the founder of this Naturalists' Trust. On the fringe of Norfolk and

Suffolk is a tract of land, known as Breckland. It is only less true to its own antiquity than Wicken Fen, and it retained some inhabitants that were disappearing from other native haunts, among them the thick-kneed plover. The place was threatened by the Forestry Commission. I went down to see the beginning of some of their work, which was done with extreme thoroughness. Over one small area in the dry and sandy soil 30,000 rabbits were killed and their ex-homes planted with a million fir-trees. It was all great national work, but odious to the neighbourhood nevertheless. The people loathed the regimented conifers. These banished most of the native animals, among others the stoats, which streamed out in altogether surprising numbers into the neighbouring lands. Sidney Long, who loved a bird like a brother and a plant like a cousin, took the threat approaching Breckland as if it were a personal calamity. By rapid action he saved a nucleus, and when he died another precious bit was bought and consecrated to his memory. His ghost could say more truly than even Wren's "SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS CIRCUMSPICE." Indeed a good part of all the sanctuaries in East Anglia are his monument, and the birds in them are often like an integral part of the scenery. What a wonderful experience to pick your way among the packed clutches of terns' nests on Blakeney Spit, while the birds are almost like a fretted roof overhead in which the clamour of a strange music echoes and re-echoes. The popularity of the district among birds is due largely to the strange behaviour of the rivers in that part of the world. They make for the sea with sufficient directness till they are on the point of arriving, but then finding themselves barred by sand and shingle, coast along to seek an exit. They leave, as at Blakeney and Aldeburgh, a narrow promontory, perfectly adapted for a sea bird's nursery. Often, as again at Blakeney and at Brancaster, when the tide rises, it runs up as quickly as the river runs down, and in such volume that it floods the land; and so every day you see in the same place two scenes that have little in common. The dweller on the Norfolk and Suffolk seaboard is forced into a vigour of observation merely by the daily change, which invests the land with the habit of the sea and shore.

Those inland waters, known as the Broads, where you see sails raised like wings across the flatness, are yet more-favourable to a large variety of birds; and there, too, are bird sanctuaries, among which Hickling is supreme the world over. A naturalist of genius was discovered in a native of the place, now known everywhere as Jim Vincent. Walking with him there, I have seen the bittern, once a vanished species, sitting on her nest in the reeds, watched at a yard or two of distance the bearded tit feeding her young, and been warned of touching this grass tuft and that for fear

of treading on a redshank's clutch. A marsh-harrier flying overhead seemed as native to the place as a tree in a park.

So it comes about that most Norfolk dwellers are of the tribe of Gilbert White, altogether absorbed in the life that surrounds them. Some cynic said that it was a rash act to marry any Norfolk woman, for some day or other she would insist on returning to Norfolk, even if it meant virtual separation. Perhaps it is true. As the owner of the *Atlantic Monthly* once said to me: "English people nurse an affection for places and homes that we can scarcely understand."

It is a pleasant thought, a real tribute to the Norfolk naturalists, that any rare bird after crossing the North Sea can drop into the safe harbourage of one or other of these East Anglian sanctuaries: Hickling, the Cley Marshes, Blakeney, Scolt Head, and others. Thereabouts the great crested grebe and the bittern began to multiply, and birds as rare as the ruff, the avocet, and the spoonbill to make shy appearances to the delight, even the excitement, of hundreds of pilgrims as well as natives.

Each year the circulation of birds among English people widens and multiplies by a steady and not altogether explicable process. Of recent years this advance in general interest has owed a deal to one writer-observer and sanctuary designer. Mr. R. M. Lockley, with great daring for a poor man, left regular employment to play Robinson Crusoe on the wonderful island of Skokholm, off the coast of Pembrokeshire, nearly opposite Milford, the best and most foolishly neglected harbour in Europe. The Continent as well as Great Britain became interested in his birds, and Skokholm begins to rival Heligoland about whose birds Gädke wrote a classical work. Walking with Lockley on the quaking turf and discussing the nests beneath our feet, I said that I had never yet seen at close quarters a stormy petrel. "Haven't you?" he said, and taking a bit of bent wire from his pocket he thrust it into a hole in a collapsed farm wall, and pulled out a perfectly good petrel. When we had sufficiently admired its delicate, graceful form and immense spread of wing he put it back into the hole, where doubtless it continued to brood its clutch. The next petrel I saw was on the deck of a steamer in the South Atlantic, some five hundred miles from the nearest land.

The peaty turf of Skokholm quakes more in some places than in others, only because it is undermined by the nests of sheerwater and puffin. Towards the edge of one cliff I sat down to watch some seals, playing close to the beach, and presently noticed a puffin standing in front of me at some four yards' distance, looking more than usually ludicrous, as if it were wearing a comedy mask. In its powerful serrated beak it held exactly six small fish, heads on one side, tails on the other.

We had stared at one another for a long inquisitive time, when it occurred to my slow wits that I was in its way. As soon as I had moved six or seven yards away the bird disappeared into a hole by which I had been sitting and assuaged the hunger of its young. One ordinary experience on the island is singularly strange and ghostlike. The sheerwater, which flies almost as far over the fields of the sea as the petrel itself, skimming the surface at a tireless speed, comes home in the dusk, still skimming every surface it passes, even risking destruction on some lighthouses, because it tops the light by so short an interval. The birds returning to the subterranean holes on Skokholm swish over the observer's head with a noise that is the authentic note of winged speed. So quickly past is the gleam of their black forms, you almost feel as if night sounds had condensed into solid forms. You are in the presence of spirits.

To Mr. Lockley these spirits are familiars. As you walk he will stop, lift up a piece of turf and disclose under the lid the back of this strange bird brooding its eggs. It is now of the earth, earthy no longer of air and night, aerial and tenebrous. What seems to me the most wonderful of all the wonderful examples of the instinct of migration is recorded of these Skokholm sheerwaters. A number of them were carried off to distant places. The Frensham ponds in Surrey and Venice were two of these. Mr. Lockley's familiarity with the individual birds, which were always ringed, enabled him to mark the exact date of their return without doubt or delay. Almost every bird came home in the minimum of time, even the Venetian exiles, though one of these was slower than the other. A hundred questions arise around the core of the mystery how they felt the magnet of their home. Did they skim the water of the Mediterranean and the Bay of Biscay, or did they top the Alps and fly higher over alien lands? The speed and accuracy, as well as the fact of their return, were quite beyond the scope of intelligence as we regard the gift. Reason doubtless is a higher gift than instinct, but vastly inferior in direct approach even among its journeymen, to a necessary end. A somewhat similar experiment with the black tern in America proved the possession of the same unerring instinct of orientation, at least in parent birds in nesting time.

Just now and again among birds—as very often with dogs and other mammals—you come upon acts that suggest a certain likeness between reason and instinct: a common attribute seems to emerge. Into one of these I made close enquiry, and the facts at any rate are beyond dispute. Sir John Courthope, a good sportsman, a good observer and a fine, English character, owns an ancestral estate by the Sussex-Surrey border. On this estate was cut the timber for the building of Westminster Hall;



and when in our time the beams began to perish through the ministrations of the death-watch beetle, the oak for their repair was taken from the same forest. Sir John computed that the saplings had just started life when their elderly neighbours were removed. Partly perhaps because of his respect for precedent, Sir John had a dislike for the little owl which had been introduced into England from Spain by Lord Lilford and others; and had spread very rapidly through the country. Every sort of story of its depredations was bruited abroad and believed. Little owls, in Mr. Lockley's belief, had killed a number of petrels even on isolated Skokholm. Lover of birds though he was, Sir John ordered the destruction of the little owls on his estate; but he gave the birds their chance of rehabilitation. All the victims, amounting to four score or more, shot by his keepers, were given a *post mortem*; and in spite of the declaration of the keepers that they had killed a number of young pheasants, not a trace of such prey was discovered by the anatomists. The order for extermination was therefore cancelled, but a strict watch still kept, and very soon a young keeper saw a small owl come down to the pheasant coops and kill seventeen chicks. The odd thing was that none was eaten then and there, but presently the killer, bringing companions with him, carried off all the little corpses. About a dozen of these were presently discovered lying in a low meadow, and on these again a continuous watch was kept for the next stage. It was not long before the burying beetles fell upon the dead bodies; and then, but not till then, the owls returned and devoured, not the pheasant chicks but the beetles! So the theory of the anatomists and friends of the little owl was reconciled with the many observations of field naturalists. To do one thing for the sake of an obscure sequel—"the far-off interest" of weeks, if not of years—is singularly suggestive of the process of reasoning. It recalls the witty saying of the great scientific observer, Professor Thompson, to the effect that birds could be much cleverer if they wanted to be or had to be.

The coast of Pembrokeshire, which may be made into a National Park, is guarded by a number of islands, all of singular interest to a naturalist or indeed any lover of scenery. I could say, with Keats, though not in his sense, "Round many a Western island have I been," but would substitute "birds" for "bards" in the next line of the sonnet. The great cliffs of Ramsey, the boiling currents of the narrow straits, the caves where the seals breed, the homes of peregrines, buzzards, puffin, and at one time even choughs were all familiar. My elder brother, a notable swimmer, was one of the two or three who swam that mile or so of seething waters between Ramsey and the mainland. The difficult rocks

of lonely St. David's Head, the cromlech on the higher ground, the breadth of Whitesands Bay, the glorious pool of Nun's Well, and the strange great marsh known as the Dowrog, lying under the couched lion of Caern Llidi, St. Davids itself, that city-village, where the cathedral itself hides in the snuggest of valleys—all these were familiar from youth up, thanks to the accident that a great-uncle had been a canon of the Cathedral, and his hospitable daughter remained there. Yet there was one island, the smallest but the strangest, which I did not know till later years when motor boats were available.

Grassholme, many miles further from the shore than the other islands, is a rock qualified by great tussocks of the grass known as Yorkshire Fog. It has been selected, like the more famous Bass Rock, as their favourite breeding home by that goose of the sea, the gannet. It is necessary perhaps to see the film made by the agency of Mr. Lockley and Mr. Julian Huxley to get a picture of the strange scene; but even that cannot give you the first sensation of your approach. The air is suddenly filled with the white wings of these great birds, shifting the light, appearing and disappearing into cloud and sky like angelic hosts, while now and again one will dive with that wild impetus belonging to a native of sea as well as air. Was ever so ethereal a spectacle more grossly dissolved when at last the landing on the rock was achieved? The nursery of many thousands of nests, where frightened young continually eject the mackerel they had swallowed, is compact of clamour and dirt and smell, and the ungainly fledgelings, anchored to their crowded tenements, seem to have no affinity whatever with those angel forms rioting in the freedom of the air or hunting in the unplumbed sea. From the unlovely but enthralling nursery you may soon escape and on the lower rocks watch at your ease a dozen, even a score or so, of seals playing just below your rocky seat; or you may find nooks where oyster-catchers and other sea birds have escaped from the gannet's monopoly.

That heavenful of Solan Geese suggested two similar spectacles within my experience; the passage of some hundreds of pelican over an Australian mere, and the rising of the swans at Abbotsbury. Abbotsbury has no parallel anywhere, not at Hickling, not at Skokholm, not on the Bempton cliffs, where the guillemots lay their many coloured, many patterned eggs in thousands, gathered by Yorkshire harvesters on swinging ropes.

The continuity of English history is oddly illustrated by the birds. In the hinterland of remembered history the swans collected in hundreds and thousands behind the barrier of the Chesil Beach, whose stout rampart of shingle holds in a soft-water lagoon; and allows the *zostera* grass to

produce an annual harvest for the birds. The swans, which were a special perquisite of Queen Elizabeth, are as many today as then. You may see swans on the nest in a great many places; in Worcester College gardens, from the railway where it crosses the Lea, or off Kew Gardens, to give three casual examples. You may catch sight of the spread wings high over the flats beside Battersea Park, and scores of swimming swans are a standard spectacle for those who venture in a steamer to the Kyles of Bute. But a thousand and more swans and nests by the hundred—these make a wonder of the world. More than this; Abbotsbury would be the peer of the greater sanctuaries if there were no swans and no zostera on the floor of the mere to justify the use of their long necks. The secret of the place is the fine gradation of fresh water into salt, as the birds know well. The sea is kept at bay by one of the most curious and immense shingle banks in the world. At Scolt Head, and many another such place for example, the plain that once was Rye Harbour, the shingle, often made of rubbed flints, serves as mere vertebrae for the sand and the psamma grass or the sea-holly, or even the Viper's bugloss, to colonise. This immense Chesil bank is like the cliff, rocky, a solid, high barrier with a mobile glacis, sorted into a mosaic pattern by tide and wind. It is too solid to be breached and torn, like a great bank at Newgall Sands, in Pembrokeshire, by the furies of any tempest and the weight of any sea. This splendid defence guards a great lagoon at Abbotsbury; and you must go to the barrier—for preference in late June—to see one of the distinctions of the region. The terns, the sea-swallows nest there, separated from the swans, as the stonecrop is separated from the great water-dropwort of the inner dykes, by a comely lake. When the birds have been fasting and are fouled a little by salt water, they fly to the neighbourhood of the swans to wash in the soft fresh water at the edge of the reeds.

The reed beds are themselves a marvel, an aeolian harp in the ears of man and bird, both. You find them, of course, on many rivers, on the Essex Thames, and, best of all, on the Ouse where it skirts the Port Holm at Godmanchester and Huntingdon between the double railway bridge and Lee's brook. These are everywhere a haven to the reed warbler, whose pendant nest, a favourite of the cuckoo's, you, too, can hardly miss. But at Abbotsbury, perhaps because the bed is so wide, so inviolate, rarer birds than these pitch their tents. Lucky persons have heard the lovely song even of the marsh warbler. Among the reeds are delightful inlets and bays where the water is saltier or fresher, according to the distance from the sea. One bay especially, is pleasing to the taste of the duck of many, sorts, and at the inland edge is one of the oldest of the

decoys, those ingenious and rather brutal traps designed in an age when such food made the difference between luxury and starvation. How often in the monkish chronicles of another fenland we find allusions to the wild-bird snare! And even today one of the few decoys that excels the subtle passages from the reed-bay at Abbotsbury is to be seen near Crowland Abbey, whose monks, like those of Abbotsbury, found the wild bird, including even the snipe, "facile to snare."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN



# War



*Old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago.*

The Solitary Reaper WORDSWORTH

IN the grounds of the Royal Agricultural Show I met Lord Desborough on the opening day and he said: "At last I have done something for British Agriculture. I have put the dairymaids into Leander colours; and they look charming!" The next time I met him was at the saddest moment of the War; and soon after, in a similar scene, I heard that the military band had been suddenly withdrawn; and shall never forget the hush that fell within the ground. Even the stock seemed to mute their lowings. Everyone knew or felt that war was certain. What was a countryman, too old for service, to do? A few weeks later, when the Battle of the Marne, the miracle of the Marne, was nearly completed, Lord Northcliffe passed me on the steps of Carmelite House and he said with the direct brevity that was his hallmark, "Well: it's no good being here, is it?" And presently I went off to France, wearing a belt, absurdly weighted with gold sovereigns. They were for a while almost the only form of currency that had any general recognition. Gold is a wonderful metal; and, as Thomas Hood wrote, "How widely its agencies vary!" In the third year of the war, coming home on a few days' leave, I travelled down with the manager of Parr's Bank. He took from his pocket a gold sovereign and asked if I noticed anything strange about it. The coin was bright and the bevel quite unworn, though the date on it was 1871. The banker explained that it was one of the coins we had sent to France for the payment of the huge war indemnity demanded by Germany. Since that date it had lain in the German war reserve in Spandau without seeing the light. As the war proceeded Germany found it wise to hold up the falling value of her currency by doling out some of this reserve to Scandinavian creditors; and presently it came back to London, still in the same bags to which the bank had consigned it forty-six years earlier. The gold standard, which we were later to scrap, had some strange illustrations.

No instructions were given in regard to my French trip beyond a

suggestion that I should see Lord Robert Cecil in Paris; and when I saw him the only suggestion he had was that the *Daily Mail* should publish a special plea for more pyjamas for the hospitals! This vague and casual commission was to keep me in France and, for a little while, in Germany off and on for four years and more. I did not return to England, except for very brief intervals, till May 1919. It is a common experience that the memory of those years suggests that they were cut out of life, as if deleted by the censor. A particular isolated section of memory is allotted to them. Vivid as a night scene lit by lightning, they yet seem to belong to a state of trance. Many people who tried to write about the war (as I did not) after it was over, found themselves, as Edmund Blunden has written of himself, robbed of words. A long period of tranquillity had to intervene before recollection could adapt itself to the vocabulary of peace. So it came about, as a French critic said, that the years succeeding the war evoked no good English prose and no good French verse. Twenty-five years have not lessened my own disinclination to write about the war as such. As a war correspondent I suppose I wrote a hundred thousand words or more of description and can recall moments of exultation, of fear, of disgust, of gloom, of pity and the rest; but the prevailing instinct is to play the censor and cut it out, to put it among the

Old unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago.

Nevertheless, from the waste emerge some smiling incidents, like bright islands in a wrecking archipelago; and these can be fitted into the geography of common life. Two days in Paris, a strangely gloomy place even then, were enough; so after writing, on Lord Robert Cecil's account, a plea for pyjamas, I took train for Epernay, with the idea of walking to Rheims to see how far the cathedral had been damaged. The Mayor of Epernay, Monsieur Pol Roget—blessings on his head—had made a great reputation. When the Germans entered his Mayoralty, they exacted the usual fine, but he showed such firm justice in dealing both with them and his own people, that the money was returned when the Germans left—probably the only example on the German records of such an act of restitution. He received me with a certain gaiety as well as kindness, and wholly accepted my point of view. Civilian passes of course were of no account; but he gave me a *laissez passer*, for what it was worth, and added to it a broad card of an engaging mauve tint. "You see," he said in effect, "we are an impatient people. The ordinary French sentry will look closely at one pass, but he will not spell out a number. So I advise you to have as many papers as possible." He knew his people well; the mauve

pass took me anywhere. The cellars of Epernay had, of course, been emptied when the Germans had to retreat; and with characteristic coarseness they had left many wine-glasses full of a fouler fluid. When I set forth on the road to Rheims I found the gutter of the road on both sides filled with broken champagne bottles, emptied on the march.

The present war has so far left the world an unhappy picture of French officers; in spite of our admiration for Generals de Gaulle and Giraud. It may be of some service to recall that in 1914 throughout these walks behind the French lines I repeatedly came into touch with the officers in command—one of them Colonel Pétain, as he then was—and found them in every case to be “officers and gentlemen,” in the full sense of that old term. My first meeting with an officer of high command was at a little village west of Rheims. He was at work with his chief of staff—and all French staffs, especially Foch’s, were small—in a little, low kitchen, and took me down himself to the barrack-room. While my safe conduct was being made out, I had the opportunity to watch the natural refinement with which he gave orders to soldiers and answered the questions of civilians. His dignity of office, it seemed to me, was maintained solely by force of a master refinement, which would allow no reliance on clanking sword or pride of position or professional tone of command. He was as the rest—only a better man. For one instant his quiet courtesy gave way to fine scorn. He was taking me to a point where a jolly lane through the vineyards offered a short cut to my destination, when he stopped and said: “Come with me. I have something to show you.” We turned back and the General opened the door of the one little village shop. Its humbleness would be hard to parallel even in English villages. It stocked cheap caps and ties and stuffs and a few toys. The whole of what stock remained was heaped on the floor in a tangle of dirt and confusion. The heap reminded me exactly of the scene in a certain cricket pavilion in Surrey, which I once visited a few hours after it had been entered by thieves on their way to the Kent hop-fields. The Germans had done exactly what the thieves had done. The old woman to whom the stock belonged complained that they had taken “all that was most precious.” They had sorted out especially certain sham plaid ties, worth perhaps sixpence each; and this sum represented precious value in the eyes of the old woman. Were the looters intending to flaunt the ties as trophies from the Scots? The General said nothing; but his gesture expressed what half the French residents of the little French towns and villages were saying in one form or other: “It is commerce, not war with these Germans.”

I saw a more amazing example of this careful commercial brigandage close to La Fertè-sous-Jouarre. A light motor car with a wagon body

had broken down. Round about, trampled in the dust, were samples of ware which suggested that a commercial traveller on a large scale had come to grief with his samples. The remnants represented the careful and highly instructed pillage of the shops in the surrounding villages. Whether they were on their way back to Germany, like the precious objects of art stolen by a higher brigand from the Château de Baye, or still later by Ribbentrop from the Castle at Prague, I do not know. They included sheets, blankets and pillows from village inns.

An artillery officer, whom I met in the same neighbourhood, talked with me hour after hour on the subject of the campaign. He was a great soldier, but what he talked of was not so much war as peace. The man had a passion for peace. He was clearly a considerable mathematician and man of science. He had studied closely the science of artillery. He told me, for example, of experiments being successfully concluded, for the manufacture of a powder which produced a blue flame on explosion—a colour virtually invisible at night. But his interest was academic though practical. He hated nothing more than explosives. The sight of a shattered bridge roused him to a passionate outburst. "These things belong to humanity, and it is a crime against humanity that they should be scattered to the winds." He regarded the war solely as a means to a greater and more permanent peace. The deaths and pains of men, the cruelty to horses, the loss of harvests, the ruin of peace of mind, the breaking of the quiet passage of civil life, the shattering of historic buildings; all these filled him with a great and righteous wrath. In his quiet humble way he stood for the happy warrior of Wordsworth, whose

Master bias leans

To home-felt pleasures and to gentle scenes;

and thereby he was the better fighter, I have no doubt.

Another French officer—a colonel of artillery—met me as he was retiring owing to a sudden weakness of heart. He too was curiously philosophic; but his master interest was history. In discussing the 1870 campaign and its parallels with 1914 he made a very French epigram. "*The ruses-de-guerre* of the Germans," he said, "are excellent, their tactics good, their strategy rotten." He was amused, even delighted, at the parody of his epigram when I suggested that a similar criticism might be made of the German language: "Its words are magnificent, its phrases good, its construction rotten." A personal experience of his at the battle of the Marne, then only a fortnight old, suggested that red tape was not unknown in the French army. In front of his battery at short range appeared a German brigade in close order. "It was a target for an artillery officer to dream of.



Every shell would have taken terrible effect, and the range was registered." But he received no orders and dared not fire a shot. A few minutes later a despatch-driver came up with precise instructions to take full advantage of the target. He had set out on a motor-bicycle and been stopped by bad roads. "I shall think of that target till my heart kills me," said the gunner.

He confirmed in detail the popular view that the Marne was won by the promptitude of Foch in advancing his guns into a wedge-shaped vacuum in the German front and using them with grim effect on the exposed troops to right and left.

This stage of the war, so far as my part was concerned, came to an end not undramatically. Waking one morning at five o'clock in the estaminet of a little village just beyond the range of German guns on the Aisne, I heard the whole household busy, and hurried to share their coffee. One Englishman was in the company, a sergeant of quite magnificent physique. He must have possessed internal organs to fit his framework. With native generosity, that in spite of occasional profiteering often marked these country inn-keepers, mine hostess offered the sergeant a generous stirrup-cup of neat brandy. It vanished as quickly as a small slug in the folds of that lightning organ, a toad's tongue. He indicated, almost in the idiom of the cliché, that he would like some of it "in a mug." The mug was brought and three times emptied; and across the shrewd face of our hostess I saw pass successive looks of anguish and admiration. Her best brandy had never vanished so quickly, but it had never before found passage down the throat of such a demigod. The early morning draught had no more effect on the sergeant than water. Or did it slightly loosen his tongue? At any rate he told me great news. The battle of the Aisne was over. He was off with his guns at all convenient speed to Belgium.

How high my heart beat that autumn morning! I see now that stalwart sergeant in the little village street, misty with the promise of a golden day. A vision danced through the mind of a German flight from France before the threat of a flank attack from Lille. I saw the first hope of a beginning to the end of the war, the return to peaceful pursuits in an island much lovelier even than La Belle France; and was not I a journalist big with news? The sergeant, before we parted, spoke of his ambitions to beat all record in moving field guns; and I am confident that he fulfilled them. For my part I walked on air, through the mist, through the growing heat till the red woods flashed in the face of the midday sun. In the afternoon I reached Château Thierry, fought my way into a train, after being once thrown out by a group of women refugees

hysterical with fear and anger, and so reached Paris and sent a thousand words of the great news to London. Never again shall I walk thirty miles or so on a diet of coffee and brandy and know no fatigue. The reason will not be age or stiffening muscles so much as the unlikelihood that such news will again coincide with such a day. Hopes fell much at the same time as the red leaves of the Aisne; but when all is said a great moment remained. And perhaps, after all, the end did begin when the German tactics shifted, when the line of the Aisne was judged impregnable; and a quite ludicrous optimism took possession of the British high command.

On the subsequent journey from Paris to Calais I heard again of Pol Roget and made a new friend, Mr. Hedges Butler, famous as traveller and pioneer of ballooning, though perhaps more famous as a wine merchant. He had been caught in the cellars of Rheims while investigating the merits of champagne that was to be transferred to the immense cellars tunnelled below Regent Street; and years later I was asked to enjoy such vintages at luncheon in that troglodyte palace. We discovered in the train that we had a common acquaintance in Pol Roget; and when we parted Mr. Hedges Butler gave me—not the last of such gifts—a medicine bottle containing a most delectable liqueur brewed by Pol Roget for his own domestic consumption. From Calais, which we reached after a seventeen hours' journey, I took the last train that was to leave there with Lille for its destination for another four years. We saw from the train window the helmets of two Uhlans disappearing behind shocks of corn and got no further than Hazebrouck, where I lay on the railway bank with some French dragoons during a short engagement, when both cannon and rifle were fired at a quite invisible, perhaps non-existent, target.

Marshal Pétain's later reputation as a defeatist with anti-English sentiments, is wholly justified, but it may qualify the general view of his character at least in earlier days to record my first meeting with him when he was no more than a colonel. By means of some fortunate manoeuvres, Mr. Raikes, one of *The Times's* sub-editors, and I, managed to make our way into Arras, which had that day been bombarded for the first time, and some of the buildings of the beautiful and historic Petite Place most scientifically shattered. Nerves were on edge; and we were arrested and taken back to French Headquarters. The Chief of Staff was in a furious rage for—as he told me two years later—he had been vainly searching for these two suspicious foreigners the whole day. We were taken before "the Colonel," who would, doubtless, we were told, order our deportation or imprisonment. Even in these circumstances the fine,

handsome face and dignified soldierly mien of the Colonel struck me forcibly. Here was another soldier of the type I had admired—and found congenial—elsewhere. I said to him at once that we had gone to Arras because it seemed to me a good thing that the world should know all about these German crimes against beautiful French buildings. The point appealed to him. He banged his right fist into his left palm, ejaculated “*bon*”—that and no more—ordered his car (a powerful German Mors), and himself drove with us back to Arras. As we passed through the French lines just behind the town we saw a single *poilu* outside his trench. The car was stopped abruptly, the Colonel leapt out, sent for the officer commanding, and dressed him down with eloquence. What did he mean by allowing a man to show himself when a German aeroplane was about? Did he not know that his first job was to save French lives? In that question Pétain’s master feeling appeared, as it seemed to me ever afterwards. He, and only he, was able to quell the very serious mutiny in the French army after the failure of the attack on the Chemin des Dames solely because of his reputation as a life-saver; his worse or his better acts had the same motive. A passion to save French lives—never mind English lives—induced him to suggest leaving Haig in the lurch and retiring on Paris in May 1918. His diplomatic conduct in Spain, leading to his base surrender after the French defeat in 1940, was due at any rate negatively to his extreme reluctance to risk further life. Indeed, thanks largely to his influence, the cry, “Save French lives at all costs,” had become general throughout France early in 1918. Yet Pétain was a fine soldier, strong and thorough and courageous within his narrow limits. I cannot but remember him with a certain admiration; *corruptio optimi pessima*.

The race from the Aisne to the north and west had failed both sides. The opposing armies had reached the sea, and trench warfare in all its muddy tragedy had become established. It was to endure with intervals of cruel direct assault with narrowly limited objectives on mud and wire fortresses, for years that seemed interminable.

For the first year our War Office remained so hostile to the sending of news from the British front, that British war correspondents could exercise their function only in districts occupied by the French or Belgians. Soon after my failure to reach Lille (which I was to enter ahead of our troops nearly four years later in the autumn of 1918) I went to the Belgian front, and I happened to meet in Furnes, the only town left to the Belgians, an old historian, who had just given details to the military authorities of the flooding of the country in two campaigns of the eighteenth century. He had the book recording the fact spread out and showed me the more

salient passages. Whether his information was the principal cause or no, I do not know, but the land was at once flooded after the old recipe, and the Belgian trenches, dug at the near edge of the inundation, remained in being till the war was over.

Was ever such a ludicrous picture of static warfare? I visited these trenches repeatedly at the end of 1914, and once or twice in later years. At first they were shallow and waterlogged. You looked over the petty parapets to see a waste of waters in which one recently drowned cow stood upright, as if carved, swollen and hideous. The German shells fell spasmodically on the pretty villages of Ramscapelle and Pervyse, where a crucified figure was one of the few things that remained undamaged in the shattered church. The first time that I walked up to the trench—there were no communication trenches—I came upon three dead hares, all killed by the shock of shell explosions. With the addition of the white bread and brandy that I was able to bring from Calais we had some very merry meals in shattered houses just behind the trenches; and the officers were full of confidence and of a gratifying belief that Britain could not be beaten. In 1918 the scene was no longer grim. Real war seemed to have degenerated into mere prettiness. Where the worst trenches had been dug had arisen numbers of comical bungalows, some of them with glazed windows and neat little gardens behind. Where the cow had stood—and ultimately exploded—stretched a not unpleasing lagoon dotted with little islands; through the trench line canals had been cut. The place was a northern Venice. You could take a boat, go rowing out into the lagoon, and if you were lucky bring back a few plover or duck for supper. Now and again a shell whined overhead, but most of them were small and aimed promiscuously, nearly always falling far behind the trenches. They seemed to be robbed of all terror and deadliness though, it is true that I was once in serious peril from their propinquity. This was not due directly to the shell itself, but to the effect on my Belgian chauffeur. He set the car, which was powerful, at full speed over a road that resembled a field of half-flooded ridge and furrow. It was all I could do not to be catapulted out.

A little later the shelling was intensified on back areas and the Belgian Government, driven even from Furnes, operated from Le Havre. In the desolate days I came back for memory's sake to look at the place, and as we drove into the chief square there appeared from the opposite corner the immense heroic figure of the King of the Belgians, accompanied by a single officer. A king looked at the last crumbling remnant of his kingdom; and in figure, in guise and indeed in spirit he was a king indeed. The next time I saw him all the black past was forgotten in

the midst of the most ecstatic scene of rejoicing within my experience. The great and glorious square of Brussels was so packed with cheering crowds that a mouse could hardly have crossed it. The King and his staff had returned to his capital and had that day met the heroic burgomaster M<sup>a</sup>x, just back from German captivity. A small company, including that stately and charming priest, Cardinal Mercier, assembled in an upper room in the Palace; and as the King—the regal six foot and a half of him—stepped out on the balcony, you could feel the shock of the cheering like an exploding shell. For mere curiosity I went for a moment to stand alongside the King and felt a mere wisp of a man. Nor was it the majesty that doth fence a king which gave the sense of his physical magnitude. His heart, if not his brain, was of a piece with his body.

The most buoyant of those, whether Belgian or British, who shared in the terrible fighting on the Yser and at Ypres could hardly have imagined such a day of ecstatic exhilaration; and yet the spirit of man, of the cockney not less than the king, triumphed even in the midst of trenches knee-deep in water. A young British officer, setting off on a round of inspection in such a thinly-held and water-logged trench at the very crisis of the German attack, was wondering what he could say to maintain the spirit of his men. As he began to round a traverse he heard a soldier say, in the best Cockney accent, "They tell me the leave boats will soon be able to sail up the trench to fetch us 'ome"—and the officer knew that he had come to learn, not to teach. Humorous stories never buzzed round so persuasively as at the worst crisis, both among officers and men. A brigadier who had the reputation of not visiting the front trench as often as he might, came down one day, looked over the parapet with a periscope and, not without a note of alarm, told a young officer to ring up the battery and tell them that the enemy had taken down their wire and probably meant to attack. The young officer, whose name was Lyttelton, did what he was told, but added in his own pleasant and humorous drawl: "Don't worry, battery; it's only that the turnips have grown!"

It was not only wire that the farm crops could conceal. That great and gallant sportsman, Hesketh Prichard, who set afoot the first sniping school in France, told in his excellent book on sniping a moving tale of a German sniper who crawled out every night in a green camouflage into some turnips and from that base did deadly work till an accident betrayed him and he paid the penalty.

How many harvest scenes stand out in memory! Both Belgian and French peasants refused to leave their fields till compelled and returned

at the first possible moment to fill up craters and salve what could be salvaged. All one sunny autumn day just behind our lines I watched an old French smallholder and his stout wife harvesting with unresting labour their small plot of wheat. He mowed and mowed with untiring rhythm while she followed and tied the corn into sheaves. To aid her labours he mowed, not as we do, away from the standing crop, but towards it, so that she could more easily get her old arms under the leaning straw. Since he was a famous mower her labours were perhaps the harder. As one of the neighbours said in a telling phrase: "*Elle avait de quoi; elle avait de quoi*"—she had her work cut out to keep pace.

Again, the cornlands east of Amiens were covered with the nap of flourishing crops after the British army had delivered its decisive blow alone the Somme on August 8, 1918; and some of the most successful individual fighting of the war succeeded. The retreating Germans set up a defence zone some five or six miles in depth, consisting chiefly of machine-gun posts. The laying of surface mines was not then practised, though delay action mines were frequent. Small groups of Australians going out on their own initiative and using the crops as cover fought almost after the Red Indian manner; and would come back time and again with a few prisoners and a captured machine-gun or two. The defensive zone shrank and vanished to nothing without any regular assault, and presently the Australians were enabled to crown their desultory achievement with a very remarkable deed of arms, which owed its success largely to Australian skill with a cricket ball. The Germans were entrenched on a hill defending Peronne. The commander of one of the Australian divisions—a very able Jew, like their commander-in-chief—crossed the river unobserved and decided to attack a key trench without artillery bombardment. A small number of men went forward in the dark, half of them loaded to the teeth with bombs. These they lobbed over the heads of the other half, who advanced further and, thanks to the accuracy of the lobbing, entered the trench almost unopposed and worked along it. The hill was wholly occupied with little further fighting.

What a scene of desolation was revealed at Peronne itself, which I entered on the day after this feat. Every single house had been scientifically blown up by the departing enemy. I failed to find one that had been spared. In the market place stood a huge dummy figure, a sort of scarecrow, with a motto in big letters affixed: "*Nicht ärgern, nur wundern.*" What its inwardness might be, who shall determine?

All this was years ahead. The halting War Office, continually progged by the Newspaper Proprietors, decided in 1915 on a definite policy. Free-lance correspondents, discouraged, began to disappear from the scene.

Five correspondents and no more were to be recognised and were to be a definite part of army organisation, though not themselves soldiers. One represented Reuters, four the whole of the daily press, each covering two daily newspapers, though very soon the *Daily Mail* was left alone owing to the decease of the *Standard*, with which it had been paired. The five inhabited a succession of French chateaux, and were accorded three "conducting officers" and censors, with an equipment of batmen, lorries, motor cars and the rest. At first the head of the Intelligence Department, under which this organisation was ranged, held it to be his job to "waste the time of the correspondents" so far as possible and let them know as little as possible; but gradually the view expanded, and before the end of the war, such Intelligence Officers as Sir Charles Harington, of the Second Army, would give us a full account of the scheme of the attack arranged for the following day and sometimes find us a suitable observation post close behind it. Mr. Winston Churchill said to a representative of the *Daily Mail* in 1914: "The war will be fought in a fog and the best place for a war correspondent is London." Such a view was found to be a failure and its opposite a success. A democracy must know, if it is to function. Perhaps the most pleasing letter I ever received was from an unknown correspondent. "Without your despatches," he wrote, "we could never have persuaded the men to work throughout the bank holiday." The spirit of the people is not moved to the finer issues of war by merely geographic and mechanical news.

In spite of war and in the midst of war, dwelling in these French country houses gave us some of the charms of life for which they were designed. General Smuts told me once, years later, that he could not possibly have stood up against the hardships and misfortunes of life during and after the Boer War, if he had not been a botanist. He is a first-rate scientific botanist, with a gift for the discovery of rarities; and even to-day spends a good deal of time in botanical walks, up Table Mountain and such difficult sites. I once heard my country neighbour, Bernard Shaw, speak with some scorn of Edward Grey, on the ground that his interests were in English birds and such things when he ought to have been deep in foreign politics. There may be something in the charge; but the "master bias" of many a happy warrior has been much the same as Edward Grey's and General Smuts'! A young friend of mine, a member of a family all madly enthusiastic about birds, confessed that for a quarter of an hour during the heat of the retreat to Dunkirk, he lay down, forgetful of adjacent bullets while he watched a hoopoe, an entrancing bird that he had not seen before. With such examples I cannot be ashamed to confess that many delightful hours were spent in the parks and gardens

and surrounding farms of these French chateaux in the gentle arts proper to country life. It happened that one of the four correspondents, Perry Robinson of *The Times*, was an admirable naturalist, one of a family of naturalists. His eldest brother, Phil Robinson, at one time on the *Daily Telegraph*, had written essays almost of genius on various aspects of natural history. His youngest brother, E. K. Robinson (whom I have referred to as a predecessor on the *Globe*), founded the British Empire Naturalists Association. Perry Robinson, who had spent a good deal of his life after leaving Oxford in the United States in urban surroundings, had retained much of his early interest and knowledge, especially on entomology. One conducting officer (whom I had known as a schoolboy and a football blue at Oxford) shared our zeal. It happened in the early summer of 1916, when preparations were being made for the campaign battle of the Somme, that a hush, or hush-hush, period coincided with the nesting season, while we inhabited a chateau in the deep, deep country. Throughout an interim fortnight we combed out the neighbourhood for birds' nests and found a certain number of rarities, or at any rate of birds new to us; and we were helped by one of the batmen, who could shin up any tree that ever grew. Naturalists, like freemasons, have a certain gift of finding one another out; and among fellow observers, with whom I had memorable walks, was Captain Ingram, who published a standard book on the birds of France. He had an ear as acute and discerning as W. H. Hudson's. My walk with him was just after the singing season, but any chirp was enough for his sensitive ears. Four times in that walk I was able to test the almost uncanny accuracy of his hearing and memory. My eyes proved the record of his ears. Though I can recognise a good number of songs, almost instinctively, such power of inference as his from chirps and calls was altogether outside my scope.

In our birds'-nesting experiences three birds especially delighted us: the little bittern, whose nest and eggs we discovered in the marshes round St. Omer, the icterine warbler, whose bunting-like eggs and imitative songs were wholly new, and the golden oriole, whose short, fluty song, of the blackbird quality, became almost a bore. I was to hear its song and watch the quick flash of its golden wings yet again in the old fortress encampment by Cologne in the days of the occupation of the Ruhr. Perry Robinson had one flash of inspiration. He was persuaded that the most glorious of butterflies, the purple emperor, must flourish in the neighbourhood, so he sent to London for a captive female, which, in spite of the war, arrived safely. It was put in a cage in the garden of the chateau. On the second day we saw a number of males fluttering about the cage. They had come doubtless from a neighbouring wood;



but what incredible sensitiveness of sense the insect must possess for the message so to carry. It is no wonder that observers are continually querying the existence of a sixth sense; but the known senses are perhaps enough, though one of them must be fine beyond the scope of our grosser capacities. Birds forced themselves on our notice even when the hush-hush period came to an end. As we went down to watch the opening bombardment of the Somme battle I saw a grey shrike for the first time; and on the third day of that grim battle, when Perry Robinson and I lay out all night on a heathy hillside by Meaulte to watch the wiping out of a village fortress, quail came chattering up to us just as the larks opened their morning orison. How many such little scenes stand clear, while battles and the names of both people and places are a muddle and a medley of confused images, a nightmare willingly forgotten! You see the one with serene enjoyment, the other in excited stress. Day after day we spent hours in a car going at high speed over roads full of military transport, saw and heard terrible and glorious dramas, and without any gap for reflection poured out the experience in thousands of words, triplicated, by military orders, from a typewriter. Often the strain was intense. As to danger, which was not great, the chauffeurs sometimes had the worse of the deal. Often we left the car half hidden by some wood or ruined building and would walk forward to find the desired communication trench or selected observation post, one of which was the top of a very high tree. Shells would whine overhead and explode miles behind us; it might be where the car had been parked. There seemed to be as a rule an intermediate zone left in comparative peace and shelling was often more frequent, though, of course, less concentrated, on back areas and lines of communication than on forward trenches.

In command of a corps stationed at Meaulte—Moulty, as the soldiers called it—was Lord Cavan, who had been a near neighbour of mine in Hertfordshire. For a while he was M.F.H., and the Prince of Wales had hunted with his pack. The Prince was now A.D.C. to the General, and I met him more than once mounted on an old bicycle on his way to fetch the letters. He was always more than eager to take his full share of the burden—and the risk. When an officer, who had been sent to fetch him from a dangerous spot, protested, the Prince argued that it would not matter if he was killed. "No," said the officer, "but it might matter if you were taken prisoner." Walking with him once to see the installation of a new heavy howitzer in a well-camouflaged site, we were dogged by an official photographer who skipped about in a most irritating fashion in his desire to get a good snapshot of the Prince, who hated such

publicity. "Will no one," he said to me, "shoot that photographer?" The historical parallel was so close and obvious that he must have been thinking, if unconsciously, of Henry II's fatal cry: "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" Happily the petulant protest on this occasion did not lead to a tragedy.

One of the most interesting little expeditions made at Lord Cavan's suggestion was at the date of a voluntary retirement by the Germans. A young intelligence officer was sent out to try to discover how far the Germans had gone; and I went with him. We were lucky enough actually to see two or three of the German rearguard, who withdrew rapidly on the approach of a small body of King Edward's Horse. The scene was the edge of a small and comely village. With their usual beastly thoroughness the Germans had destroyed everything possible on their retreat. Every apple tree had been cut down; and I can still see the severed trunk of a small, very fondly and very carefully trained espalier apple on a cottage wall. It was this sort of needless venomous destruction that filled some of our Australian soldiers with a passionate hate not evoked by much deadlier offences. It seemed to them evidence—though their idiom was different—of Plato's (and Bunyan's) "sin in the soul." Such destruction produces lasting anger.

The spectacle of a country devastated by the engines of war leaves only sadness; and the depression of it seen day after day, indeed year after year, is not easily dispersed. It is hard to believe that ruin can be utterly complete. That day my companion and I crossed a stretch of road which had once been used for motor racing and trials; and neither going nor coming back did we discover the whereabouts of the road we had crossed. An English countryman could not but feel thankful that his country had not so suffered. Poor France! Three times within my lifetime she has been ravaged by the same ruthless enemy whose savagery had increased with each assault, till nothing was safe, not even woman and child. The order from Headquarters to the German air force in 1940—picked up by our wireless—"Harry the refugees with machine guns," was still to come, was still unimagined, as I looked with pity on that severed espalier. I could not help mentioning the little tree in a despatch; and it brought the only rebuke I ever received from Lord Northcliffe. He wired: "Excellent despatch spoilt by the use of the French word *espalier* and the technical word 'camouflage'!" In the next copy of the paper that I saw was a short article carefully explaining the exact meaning and origin of the word "camouflage!" *Espalier* was left to its Gallic obscurity.

How some obscurities become common-places! It was in the same

year that we went in the dusk to see a brand new weapon about which nothing had been so much as whispered. It was called a tank. How toad-like, almost obscene, they looked drawn up under the shade of a hedge in the dull light; and how awkward with a separate wheel behind them to help in the steering. And how terrible they seemed to the Germans! Rather more than a year later we captured wooden life-size models which had been paraded before German troops to accustom them to the sight of these strange beasts. A description of them which I was allowed to telegraph to London, contained some reference to the "Jabberwock and slithy toves." Unlike Lord Northcliffe, who loathed any obscurity, an unknown Frenchwoman—was she satyric?—wrote to thank me for my "*mots magnifiques*"! The works of Lewis Carroll were doubtless unknown to her.

Incidental dramas, such as the first appearance of the tanks, broke the tragic monotony of things from time to time, but if ever one allowed oneself to think, it was scarcely possible not to fall into the Slough of Despond. The worst time had been around the first battle of Ypres. I was then for the most part in Boulogne; and there met Lord Desborough day after day as he went to and from the deathbed of Julian Grenfell. It seemed to him as to me that the very pick of English youth had been thrown in to stop a gap which ought never to have existed. The Germans boast that war is a glorious illustration of the survival of the fittest. "Unfittest" would be truer. Julian Grenfell was in all respects a supreme type of his race, in body, in character and in mind. A little while before he received the head wound of which he died he wrote one of the most moving lyrics in the English language. He was not, I think—though eminent critics disagree—so great a poet as Rupert Brooke, who also was sacrificed; but he excelled him in emotional force.

The fighting man shall from the sun  
Take warmth, and life from the glowing earth;  
Speed with the light-foot winds to run,  
And with the trees to newer birth;  
And find, when fighting shall be done,  
Great rest, and fullness after dearth.

How many of the finest types died in the first bouts of the war; and as the days went forward distinction of personalities was drowned in multitudinous slaughter. It was almost unbearable to watch our troops, each man with an immense label on his back, going forward in the gloom of night on July 1, 1916—so terribly did they resemble the numbered flocks being sent to deliberate slaughter. Before the next sun set sixty

thousand of our men were dead or wounded. Two days later I went to see that notorious general, Hunter Weston, whose troops met with the worst disaster, and he gave me the exact figures of calamity, with a frankness that amazed me. He began with the Newfoundlanders because he knew that I had a special interest in them. They were not in the first attack but were sent up in support owing to a false reading of signals from the few who had reached their objective. They saw no enemy and did not, I think, fire a shot. They went up 758 strong with 22 officers. The casualties were 710 among the men. All the 22 officers were casualties; and four more were lost in later attempts to fetch in the wounded. The 16th Middlesex suffered in very much the same proportion. Out of a total of 696 men and 22 officers, 614 men and 22 officers were casualties. That any troops could stand such losses without loss of pluck is beyond praise, beyond belief.

July 31, 1917, and the next four months plumbed worse depths even than the Somme. Almost every day I went to the ruins of Ypres and then up the Pilkem Ridge and watched the fight with the mud. There our field gunners for the first time lost almost as heavily as the infantry; and on occasion both gunners and guns disappeared irrecoverably into the soft slime. We advanced with incredible persistence; and when the inconclusive end was reached our losses had mounted to 400,000. Just as they thought the crown of the Passchendaele Ridge was about to be won, General Plumer and his staff, who had performed miracles of organisation after two years and more of stone-walling, were sent off to Italy, to retrieve the Caporetto disaster. That clear-headed chief of staff, Sir Charles Harington, of whom I saw a good deal, almost broke down with disappointment.

Most of the historians have condemned Passchendaele as a terrible strategic blunder, due largely to the obstinacy of Field Marshal Haig, "the man with a square chin." It was a tragedy and achieved no concrete end. Nevertheless it drew division after German division into the slough and more than any other battle broke the spirit of the Germans. We know that now. The sacrifice was excessive, but not vain.

## CHAPTER TWELVE



# An American Episode



*It seemed to me very attractive that this executive head of the most powerful country in the world should have this simple, touching desire to hear the song of birds, and I wrote back at once to Mr. Bryce to say that when President Roosevelt came to England I should be delighted to do for him what he wanted.*

Fallodon Papers    VISCOUNT GREY OF FALLODON

THE war had proceeded in the gloom of its interminable tragedy through its fourth winter, when an interval was granted me. Lord Northcliffe sent for me. He had left, and was to sell, his beautiful Surrey home and had given up any considerable London house, because he did not wish to incur the charge of using an excessive number of servants. He asked me to lunch at the small house in Buckingham Street; and with his usual suddenness, sprang the news during luncheon that he wanted me to go to the United States for a few months. So off I went with the minimum of delay in a huge White Star liner chartered to take out among others our new ambassador, Lord Reading, his A.D.C., now Lord Swinton, and some officers who were to give instructions in the art of trans-shipping troops. "You see," as an American explained to me, "you are the only people who have had experience in amphibious warfare."

The ship trusted to her speed. We received several S.O.S. messages, and, under orders, steamed as fast as might be in the opposite direction. We were entirely unaccompanied, trusting solely to speed. Nevertheless the morning after our arrival New York newspapers were full of accounts of the wonderful flotilla of ships of war that had encircled us. Such false inferences are drawn when news-getters are baffled by official secrecy. I returned nearly three months later in a convoy. Since the range of submarines was then much shorter than now, we were unprotected till within about forty hours of Ireland, when a fleet of destroyers, a most comforting spectacle, met us and shepherded us into Liverpool.

Before they met us we experienced a strange and even frightening freak of the weather. Standing on deck and looking at the ten ships grouped closely round us, I saw them one and all begin to vanish. They appeared to be sinking smoothly and silently. The hulls vanished pro-

gressively, and at last you could only see the top of the mast in one or two of the larger ships. The fact, of course, was that a sudden chill in the water had produced a sea mist that rose higher and higher in quick but steady progression till it enveloped the ships; but the illusion was so complete that many passengers were utterly terrified; and we all had to rub our eyes in wonder. Very soon we were in a warmer belt, and the companion ships re-emerged from the waters.

The American trip was interesting because of the many personalities I met and had some speech with: Theodore Roosevelt, President Wilson, "Charlie" Schwabe, Hoover, Henry Ford, Colonel House, and even "Billy Sunday"—that most corybantic Christian—and of them all the most congenial was Colonel Roosevelt, as he called himself, or T.R., as he was called by the public. The half-day I spent with him was wholly delightful; and when once we launched into the subject of natural history, he let all reserve go, and talked with utter frankness even on politics, including his feelings towards President Wilson and the Kaiser. He was not very fond of either. Some parts of an account of our talk may be unearthed.

I had longed wished to meet him for a host of reasons: because of his friendship with Horace Plunkett and Lord Grey, because of his books on natural history, because of his lusty championship of his friend Burroughes, the best of American ornithologists, in a famous controversy on "nature-fakers." And what do you suppose Colonel Roosevelt was doing when I reached the door of his most beautiful home among the woods of Sagamore Hill? He had speeches to keep him busy, several hundreds of letters to dictate every day, and he was contributing regularly to a Middle West paper; but at this moment he was indignantly answering some writer on natural history who had gone wrong on South African deer and was castigating the excesses of the Neo-Darwinians—the word was the Colonel's own—on the subject of protective coloration.

He saw me from his desk and came round to open the door himself, and took me to the wide inner hall, which was a treasure-cave strewn with gems in precious metals and in vellum, with vast ivory tusks for its stalactites and stalagmites. It was a great room to talk in, while you sat in the deep window and looked out over the spacious view, sipped English tea, and handled untold treasure, the gifts of kings and emperors, or the booty of many continents.

Much the most remarkable gift that he showed me was a selection of photographs presented to him by the Kaiser after a military review in Germany. The Kaiser had written on the back all manner of the rashest

sentiments. "You and I together could rule the world," was one. T.R. had set these photographs in a case so that the back as well as the front could be seen. They were more or less a secret at the time, but T.R. was one of those rash—or shall we say wise?—men who trusted acquaintances completely, if he trusted them at all. He trusted me, I think, because of a common delight in natural history, and more particularly because I had fought on his side in a now forgotten campaign against "nature-fakers."

His stories of the endeavours of the German staff to recover the photographs was very characteristic of the two nations. The German military staff offered to give Mr. Roosevelt an album, gorgeously illuminated, and signed by the Kaiser with an appropriate sentiment. But T.R. was aware of the lure. The Kaiser's indiscreet, blazingly indiscreet, sentiments, written in his own hand, were a prize too rich to be entrusted to the mercies of the general staff. He refused to deliver, and took exceptional precautions to guard the photographs safely.

His humour shifted into something like passion when he began to discuss President Wilson. How he hated his successor's mental attitude in general as well as his particular action in regard to the war! The feeling was doubtless in some degree personal. T.R. had burned to rush over to France with his own division the moment the United States entered the war. It was, of course, an impossible, though a noble ambition. Imagine this masterful man commanding a division enrolled by himself under the authority of a corps commander and an army commander, and perhaps a commander-in-chief! But army ambitions were in his blood at this time, and he nursed an impassioned belief in the cause of the Allies.

He showed his big heart and male courage over his illness, from which he was convalescent at the time. The operation to his ear had destroyed his sense of balance, and he described very vividly how he was learning to walk again. As he walked with you, refusing an arm, you could see that the planting of each foot was a distinct and separate act of conscious will. He had confidence in his complete recovery, but, alas, he was to die a few months later. The world lost a human and very lovable personality. Whether or no he possessed a great brain may be debated, but I never met a man who had so much control over his mental processes. A friend told me that he had heard him address a crowd in the open air on a windy day. Only those towards whom he turned could hear what he said; so he spoke three speeches, one to those on the left, one to the centre, one to the right. The three speeches were different and were

given in successive sentences; but he managed the triple feat without confusion, without pausing for a word or thought.

I played the game of trying him with the names of people he had met casually in England years ago. All the names and incidents came to him instantly without any apparent act of recollection. Within the course of an hour or two he had talked persuasively on a great range of subjects. Fatally ill as he was, nevertheless at every turn he still seemed the compact epitome of American virility. Every word he uttered was separate and clear-cut, every thought was vigorous, as it found precise expression past the barrier of the most perfect teeth on the Continent.

His memory, indeed, was so completely instinctive that he startled you occasionally by naming the people you were thinking of. I happened to be saying something about protective mimicry in animals, when he capped me by a reference to an Oxford professor. "Even Poulton, good man as he is, goes to excesses," he said. Professor Poulton, whom I had met in Oxford, was the very man whose work and whose specious evidence were in my mind at the moment.

His uncanny recollection of faces and names was the natural outcome of the intense humanity of the man. The longer you talked the more his came out into the open. It was a little hidden at first by his preciseness of speech and the armour common to public men. But the disguise fell off in the twinkling of an eye, when common congenial ground was touched, and perhaps it was never worn for many minutes in the circle of his home. His very clothes forbade it. They suggested a work-a-day farmer or gamekeeper, and I had an insane desire to ask whether his gray homespun stockings were not knit on the spot before the farm hearth during the winter evenings.

One could not talk for long in wartime without coming round to lost friends and lost opportunities. Colonel Roosevelt was saying how humble he felt in the presence of people like Viscount Grey and F. C. Selous. They saw so much in nature that he, naturalist though he was to his finger tips, would miss. And I spoke of the pity of Selous's death, the oldest lieutenant in the British Army, and the fittest man I ever knew.

"Yes, yes," he said with a sigh. "But what a fine death! And Selous would have wished it so." It was a fine epitaph to a great fighter from a great fighter; and so we came to speak of the war and America's part in it.

Colonel Roosevelt had four sons and a brother-in-law fighting. One was wounded in France, one was in our armoured motor service in Mesopotamia, and one in the Flying Corps. It was the supreme regret of his life which he did not attempt to disguise, that he was not of that



noble company. There came back to his memory his fighting time in the Spanish war. Within sixty days of the raising of his recruits in America his men were already veterans, one-third of the men and one-fifth of the officers casualties on the field.

He spoke with animation of the coloured troops. "They will fight well. I know they will fight well, for I have fought with them. Well led, they are as good as any troops you could wish. If I had gone to France with my division we should have had two coloured regiments, one of them entirely officered by its own men." "If I had gone to France with my division"—that was the frustrated ambition engraved on his heart.

He pressed me when the time came to come back and see the red tanager with him. Alas, the red tanager had not yet arrived when I was recalled to England, so I wrote regretting that the visit was impossible. His reply was characteristic. Dating his letter "Sagamore Hill," May 4, 1918, he wrote: "That's a mighty nice letter of yours. I hope your visit to me is only deferred. No, I have not seen a tanager yet."

The surroundings of Henry Ford in Detroit had no likeness to the lovely home of Roosevelt by Oyster Bay; but Ford, too, is proud of possessing a rural mind; and, like T.R., he opened at once when certain rural topics were broached. He is a farmer's son and trails some glory from his origin. I went to Detroit with a British business man whose mission it was to know how far Fordson tractors could be delivered in England. It is true that for our edification a Ford motor car was turned out in just twenty-seven minutes; and we spent much time in watching the experimental manufacture of parts of the "Liberty engine" for aeroplanes and of Flivvers for attacking U-boats. Both were complete failures so far as the war went. Mass production did not at that date agree with so fine an instrument as the aeroplane engine, and the Flivver (photographed every two minutes by an automatic camera) was not a useful design. Ford showed off both these with pride; and he is perhaps a mechanic before all else; but any reference to the land seemed to touch a deeper instinct in him. He was all enthusiasm when I happened to say that one of the essential books on the land was Prince Kropotkin's little work called *Farms, Factories and Workshops*. He took a note about it at once; and the trigger was pulled. He began to pour forth his opinions on the farm of the future, and, not a little to my astonishment, spoke more ardently about Britain than America. It was therefore no surprise to me when he set up his English factories and began to farm intensively in Essex, using some of the wisest and most progressive of our own local farmers. His invasion has proved of real benefit to our agriculture apart from his merely local activities. It was, however, an astonishment to

hear that he regarded our recent social development as one of the great phenomena of the world, and saw in the marvel of our war organisation an earnest of the millennium to come. We were all of us to have peace when we deserved peace. In the past we had passively allowed the social cancer to grow. Some of us had tried the method of grinning and bearing it. Some of us had rubbed it with red pepper. We were now being forced to cut it out, and we were not to finish the war until we had undergone this operation. Such was Mr. Ford's general view; his philosophy of Armageddon, for he was a mystic first and a mechanic afterwards.

It would give quite a wrong impression of the man and his force not to acknowledge that he was also a typically American man of business. He had taken but one holiday in his life, and did not like it. He worked every day just as long as he could without losing his fitness. He trained for his work by running (and he looked like a runner), by walking, and by swinging the hammer. He ate just enough to keep his machine at full pitch. The energy was so continuous that none of his co-workers had ever noted an interval of moodiness or depression.

He is beyond question a mechanical genius, though his greatest success sprang from eclectic imitation. Even some of his social dreams take their root on the farm. He knew the difficulty of managing and tending a team of horses before he apprenticed himself to mechanics. He recalled the day when he was punished as a factory apprentice by a week's task of filing nuts! Out of the early training was born the Fordson Tractor, which he dreamt (twenty years before he produced it) would regenerate life on the farm and the productivity of the soil. Mr. Ford's belief that "corn, not coin, is the real sinews of war" was a little overlaid at the time of my visit to Detroit by his zeal for the Flivver and the Liberty aeroplane engine. A large number of his 40,000 workmen were busy on these unessentials, for the United States in the first European war was not the United States of the second, though perhaps it might have been if then, too, a Roosevelt had been in command. The reason why its manufacturers and government did not act quickly enough to equip even their own army with guns and aeroplanes was, I think, the presence of a certain inverted idealism and national chauvinism. The dream was that America should turn out the best gun, the best aeroplane engine, the best submarine chaser, the greatest number of merchant ships. Nothing then in existence was good enough.

After Detroit I visited a large number of factories and talked with manufacturers and soldiers. Both were vexed, even enraged, because the Government would not "release" any specific engine. Each must be brought to the highest perfection; and new lines of improvement were

continually being suggested: a higher elevation for the field gun, a better telephone for the aeroplane, concrete instead of metal for the merchant ships, and so on and so on. Not until the design had reached perfection could mass production be allowed. So instead of producing at once any existing style of engine, such as the Caproni, or Rolls Royce, preparations were made for these super-American productions that should startle the world. This was in the spring of 1918. Peace was declared in the autumn, at a date when it began to be seen that the Flivver and the concrete ship were of little use, and the Liberty engine too delicate for mass production.

Who the mistaken idealists were I do not know, but when I had speech with President Wilson at the White House it was impossible not to feel that a better fighting man was hidden away on Oyster Bay. In part, perhaps, of a common interest in country things I had felt Roosevelt to be a man and a brother. After him President Wilson seemed a cold and aloof intellectual, qualified by the philosophic obstinacy of a Lowland Scot. My chief recollections of the interview are of the charming cottage-like isolation of the White House in the midst of a capital town and of one flash of feeling from the President. He had been annoyed by a recent speech from Lloyd George. "What does he mean," he said with obvious irritation, "by saying that America will surprise the world? All I claim is that we shall stay put." The phrase was the only approach to slang or indeed natural expression in anything he said; and before he spoke he kept referring to his notes. However he did show a glimpse of another side to his character when he acknowledged his delight in the bulbs that encircled his residence. Flowers may be too strong an attraction even for an engrained philosopher-statesman! When after the Peace Terms were agreed upon the old Tiger, Clemenceau made his bitter epigram: "What could I do between a false Napoleon and a false Christ?" I thought of that early clash of character between Mr. Lloyd George, so quick and dramatic, and President Wilson, so pedantic and abstract. How difficult for such conflicting temperaments to work together to a constructive plan! In this regard history is not repeating itself. The second Roosevelt and the descendant of Marlborough possess complementary attributes.

What President Wilson lacked, his chief, though unofficial, adviser possessed in a high degree, as one incident will show. At an early stage in the Peace Conference in Paris the representatives of the Allies found themselves in a great room, each group separated from the others as succinctly as particles of shaken mercury. There was the desire to coalesce, but not at the moment the motive power; the chief actors had not arrived, and the groups eyed one another with a mixture of curiosity and shyness. At this juncture the door opened and there entered a small man, neither

conspicuous in personality to those who judge by externals, nor big in reputation, nor high in office. Indeed, he held no office at all, and had always shunned publicity. But he had not reached the middle of the room before all awkwardness, nervousness and strain began to be lifted from the bearing and the faces of the company. They joined together round the new arrival with as single a mind as if an external hand had shaken all the quicksilver drops into one pool.

I happened to know some of Colonel House's best friends in England, including Sir Horace Plunkett, for whom he had, like Roosevelt, unbounded admiration; and he showed his genius for friendship when, after some general talk in his New York flat, we left the war for more congenial subjects. He was a great cementer of Anglo-American friendship; and doubtless a diplomat born, quiet, tactful, far-seeing, and personally unambitious. Yet perhaps sometimes his prophetic skill was exaggerated by public opinion. He appeared in France pat to the moment when the armistice was signed; and everyone quoted his arrival as a crowning mark of his ability to time his movements to perfection. His arrival was in fact a sort of accident. He had come over in order to investigate French complaints about the American High Command, but found his mission most happily short-circuited by the armistice, and a much more congenial job substituted. The relations to be set right were not those between General Foch and General Pershing, but between M. Clemenceau and President Wilson. The task, however, proved in the sequel too great even for the great wisdom of President Wilson's unofficial adviser.

The United States were prevented by their idealism from sending to Europe the armament it was expected to send and was preparing; but I doubt whether English people ever fully appreciated the American contribution to some of the sinews of war. That most admirable administrator, Mr. Houston, who was Minister for Agriculture, persuaded one township after another to forswear the use of wheaten bread altogether. The list of these abstainers from wheat made a most impressive pile of documents in his office; and the abstention—at least in the judgement of my palate—meant no small sacrifice. Maize was used instead, and when I had to eat it I thought of Dr. Johnson's definition of oats as a grain eaten by horses in England and by men in Scotland. Maize is a grain eaten by hens in England, and only by man where nothing else is procurable. The reason of course for desiring large quantities of wheat for export was that this beneficent grain is an excellent traveller, while Indian corn is apt to heat. A great deal of trade depends on the capacity of this product and that to lie doggo in the belly of a ship. How many

things will not travel without infinite care! Brazil nuts from the Amazon—as I saw later on one cargo ship—need repeated turning. Only after ten years and more of research work was it discovered how to ship that delectable food, the passion fruit. We should probably drive many of our ships with sprays of coal dust, if heaps of fine coal were not inclined to spontaneous combustion. Wheat on the other hand, especially such strong dry grains as “Manitoba hard”—which look almost vitreous after maturing in the hot sun of the prairie provinces—packs tight and degenerates not at all. So it came about that during the worst period of the last war we enjoyed a sufficiency of wheaten bread within Britain, while a good part of the population of the United States was labouring to believe that maize was a palatable alternative.

Mr. Houston had one delightful story about his department. It is a wise rule that no remedy for farm or garden use may be sold till its utility is tested by the Ministry. One patent spray, called the “all-bug killer” was sent up several times for official examination and found to be harmless to many bugs, though destructive of others. It was therefore condemned; but after several other trials came back again under a new name: “*Some* bug-killer.” “Ought I to pass it?” asked Mr. Houston with his slow wise smile.

I was still in the United States—in May 1918—when the news from the war seemed almost as bad as in August 1914 or May 1940. What a difference distance makes! In France, whatever depths of sadness we plumbed at the sight as well as the knowledge of casualties, we were conscious of a basis of confidence that all would one day be well. Ill news was much harder to bear and to interpret after it had crossed the Atlantic. As to the more ignorant and parochial people of America, whose imagination had never grasped the meaning of war, they fell into errors of judgement so extravagant as to be quite cheering. Laughter is always a help. A member of a New York club, of which most kindly I was made an honorary member, asked me if I thought a battalion or two of French and English soldiers would be left to help the American army. A full battalion is a thousand men, and I assured my questioner that quite that number would be available. About the same date a coloured lift-boy said cheerfully that he supposed the war would soon end, now that the Germans could shell Paris from forty miles off. “Big Bertha,” which produced a sense of ridicule in France, had a loud propaganda voice in America. This was just before the date of Haig’s Back-to-the-wall proclamation. How I longed to be back in France! And early in June the wish was granted and I set off in one of the first of the convoys, with a number of American troops as fellow passengers, and some of our

propagandist lecturers, including Sir Harry Lauder and his manager. I hoped he would delight us with his music and his humour, but the propagandist had destroyed the musician in him. He even auctioned his sporran, which was a terrible white elephant to the unhappy purchaser, for the sake of the national finances. A considerable number of the American troops on board had never seen the sea; and one of them who came from the lakes asked me what kept it in! Ignorance of the sea seemed the less surprising when I was told that a large percentage of the American Navy were recruited from the neighbourhood of the great inland lakes—and indeed one part of Chicago is singularly like a seaside city.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN



# Back to the Army



*The Black Day of the German Army*  
Ludendorff's Memoirs

HATEFUL though war is, not least to the observer, it was somehow an intense relief, almost a genuine pleasure, to get back to France and to know by your eyes on the spot how things stood. And the moment was propitious. The Germans' last offensive, for a while as dangerous as their first, had been finally stopped, and there were signs of a retreat. Indeed at my first expedition to the front trenches (in company with two American officers, most anxious to learn) we found the opposing trench (near Albert) empty; and the shelling came from far distant guns, no longer from howitzers.

It seemed a very short while before the most cheering day in the lives of many of the Allies began to dawn, Ludendorff's "black day for Germany." It was still dark when, on August 8, 1918, I reached a selected Observation Post on the high steep ground above a bend in the Somme. Before the dawn broke we could just see our sausage balloons so close to the enemy that they seemed over the place where we knew his trenches to be. A short, intense, shattering bombardment greeted the dawn; and it seemed to split the mist. A most glorious morning began to open. The plain all along the right bank of the river was soon flooded with infantry, with tanks and at last with cavalry. For the very first time in the war, the "gap," for which our cavalry officers had so foolishly hoped and prepared before a score of attacks, was at last a fact, and they galloped forward almost hilariously, despising the slower tanks. Even as we feasted our eyes on this unprecedented scene great armies of prisoners appeared trudging along the riverside road in dejected masses, with scarcely a guard to direct their journey. Our eyes brought the certain conviction that the great change had come; the mist had indeed cleared. The brightest, most exhilarating morning of life rose from hope to certainty before news of the extent of the victory reached us. We knew that the end had begun: the static tragedy belonged only to the past. Yet it was a lamentable thing to be a journalist. At the height of the ecstasy, as "the purple noon's transparent night" enlarged and enriched the

prospect, it was necessary to fetch the car and drive back interminable miles at full speed to write and send off the despatch in time. I could not forbear telling the public what I had surrendered for their sake!

The attack had been gloriously organised and carried through not least by that most intelligent of all Jewish soldiers, Général Monash, who had shown me earlier his preparatory scheme. On the eve of the battle he sent up his tanks to the very edge of the trenches under the protecting noise of a number of aeroplanes, and their presence was wholly unexpected by the enemy. Both Canadian and Australian troops did wonders. The Australians carried through one of the most perfect leap-frogging manoeuvres ever known in war. Through the troops that took the first lines of trench, advanced at great speed the reserve troops, whose business it was to pursue; and there was no vestige of muddle in this difficult operation. Never did Australian troops give more salient proof of their athletic dash and individual daring. The work demanded an army of athletes. A relation of mine in the 17th Lancers had his horse shot under him and continued the pursuit on his second horse as he might have done—so he felt—on the hunting-field. He had a poor opinion of the tanks, which he thought got in the way of the quicker cavalry; but the infantry who advanced through the ex-machine gun nests that the tanks had knocked out held a different view.

The next day I went forward to try to find our remote front line in company with Henry Nevinson, an old friend, who had preceded me at Shrewsbury and Christ Church. His most characteristic refusal to recognise that such a thing as danger existed nearly led to a catastrophe. We were walking along the banks of the river and had stopped to argue whether we should cross to the other bank by a small bridge leading to a rather pretty village, when a soldier called out to us to come under cover. A man had just been sniped there, he said. The pretty little village was in fact full of concealed Germans, as the attack on this bank had gone much more slowly. Some two hundred were winkled out two days later. Fortunately the garrison were lying low. How peaceful everything seemed. We had spent some time in watching the pigeons that were numerous about the river, and had been providing German officers with food and sport—or so we inferred, for in a snug little hut on the bank we found the remnants of a box of Eley 12-bore cartridges and other signs that the hut had been used as both a hide and a shooting-box. Nevinson had come out just in time to use his German to advantage. A few days later a number of Germans had surrendered and there was no German-speaking officer to order them about. Nevinson took the job on with gusto.



The panorama of the great battle of August 8th had given no wrong impression. The war was over, though it had two months to run. German prisoners, of whom I saw something, were frankly, ingenuously amazed at the richness of the British stores that they had over-run in their May offensive. They had been told that we were starving, and in the manner of Germans, who are always blind slaves to those in authority, they had believed the tale. It would be arguable that one effective cause of the German collapse was this realisation that we were after all in clover. So quick had been the sway of battle that we retook some of the stores almost untouched since they were lost.

The pursuit carried forward for the next two months was a succession of British victories. Our severer critics among the French had sneered that half the British army was engaged in bringing tea to the other half; and indeed it was a strange contrast to pass the ranks of polished lorries drawn up behind the British ranks and arrive among the tumble-down vehicles with which the French managed, most successfully, to supply their forward troops. It is a French fault to under-capitalise and ours to over-capitalise any venture. When the break came and success depended on rapid advance these idle lorries came into the picture. While the French were all becoming members of the Pétain school and chiefly bent on saving French lives, as they freely confessed, Haig took up the burden. He was ready; and not only in material equipment. Foch used to come round to British Headquarters, with his ardent faith and highly generalised scheme; and then listen (some thought with no little surprise) to the precise and particular plans that the British staff had long prepared. After one long-sustained controversy he surrendered his own strategic plans to Haig's, which was to have no check. He was an inspiring commander, partly for the negative reason that he did not dull the flame of his confident enthusiasm or spacious ideas with any obscuring local detail. Whether Foch and Haig, either or both, were great as great generals go, I do not know; but their qualities were certainly complementary. The war might have been lost if the central command had been given, as very nearly it was, to Pétain, known even then (at any rate to Clemenceau and Haig, if not to others) as a born defeatist. It was this attitude that led to the making of the Maginot line and the fatal spirit developed twenty years later, under the same leadership. Haig, at that famous interview which settled the unity of command in 1918, agreed to serve under Foch and virtually refused to serve under Pétain, solely because in answer to his direct question, the one described his policy as attack and the other as defence or retreat.

So during those last months the British Army went on from one great

victory to another, till in the midst of battlefields already famous in our history—round Malplaquet, Oudenarde and Waterloo—the German plenipotentiaries crossed into our lines and the armistice was signed. In a little town square at the very central point of the cockpit of Europe. On November 11, 1918 we listened with infinite relief and gratitude to the brief, dignified religious thanksgiving held in the square of the town. The impossible had happened. "The Miracle of the Marne" had ripened its fruit after four years. For myself, I had lived through those grim years without any paralysing depression, thanks chiefly to a definite, conscious, perhaps cowardly, determination not to think at all, but to live so far as might be in the day's events, to bear what was bad in them and enjoy what was good. The policy was doubtless weak, but not without its own success.

Early in the war as I was looking at a particularly solid building the army was erecting in Calais a French woman (associated with the ownership of *Le Matin*) said to me: "We are very glad to see you, but we sometimes wonder whether we shall ever get rid of you." And I answered: "If you only knew how we are all longing to go home again you wouldn't say that." Everyone had an intense desire to rush home as soon as ever the armistice was signed; but there was another six months and more of the Continent for a large part of the army, as for the five chartered journalists.

They had many odd experiences. When Hitler and Goebbels proclaim the danger of Bolshevism and under that excuse murder those they call Communists, my mind goes back to the first township we entered, by Malmédy, and the behaviour of its mayor. The car in which I was travelling was the first to cross the frontier at this point; and the mayor hurried into the street to meet us. He showed no trace of the dignity of Herr Adenauer, who was to win the admiration of our army of occupation in Cologne. He very nearly, perhaps quite, wept, and the whole burden of his emotional greeting was, "Save us from the Communists, save us from the Communists!" What of revolution was beginning to appear in Germany after the flight of the Kaiser was of the mildest order, in spite of all the exaggerated reports about the Spartacists and other revolutionary groups; but there is no doubt that these stuffy officials were in utter terror of revolution on the left and often welcomed the troops of occupation as saviours of the existing order. The Hitler scare had a foundation in former years.

All Germans, as we found again and again among the prisoners, say the same thing, often in the same words, at any given date. So as we advanced into Germany, rather in front of the army, we knew that every

official would say what was said at Malmedy. "Save us from the Communists"; and it was so. This fear, or alleged fear, seemed quite to obliterate any signs of rancour or hostility to our troops; though a different spirit was shown in the French sphere of occupation. In Cologne a very straightforward notice commanded the people to accept the occupation "without cringing and without scorn, which are not only foreign to the German character but odious in the eyes of the enemy." On the whole the advice was taken, though now and again German orchestras struck up needlessly with French and English national airs. This proved particularly odious in the ears of the French.

Cologne was a happy place on the whole, a very happy place for much of the British army, as it was to be nearly four years later. Our bridgehead ended at a beautiful little trout stream and some beech spinneys. Officers were fishing, shooting, playing lawn tennis and golf and enjoying the opera almost before they were settled in. The rank and file began to fraternise at rather too great a speed, and many marriages followed. Not all were failures, but when the wives went to England they were often miserable, and in the coast towns at any rate they were treated almost as outcasts. Our sailors nursed a bitterer and more persistent hatred than our soldiers.

The British and German police worked well together. One of the best compliments ever paid to our national sense of order and justice was the arrival of more than a thousand extra German police on the day that our troops finally departed. I reached home at last in May 1919, wondering how far it would be possible to take up the old threads—to go back to the land, in my own particular meaning of the phrase. Little did I think that three years later I should return to Cologne, and be forced into enmity with our French allies! Victory was to go to their heads. They thought—or M. Poincaré thought—that the security they longed for could be secured by lawless force and industrial greed.

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN



### Across Canada



*From East to West the circling word has passed,  
Till West is East beside our land-locked blue;  
From East to West the tested chain holds fast,  
The well-forged link rings true!*

Song of the English RUDYARD KIPLING

THE interval between two visits to Cologne was like a short pause at an oasis in the desert. Home and children had both changed; and both were almost strangers. To be intimate again with these and with England was as satisfying a source of happiness as man could desire. We lived in a fifteenth-century house on the banks of the Lea, so dear to Isaac Walton, and it flowed through the garden, bringing with it birds and beasts as well as water-born creatures. In the great gale of 1916 a number of elms on the bank had tumbled like ninepins, and the flat base of one of them, making a sort of wall at the stream's edge, had become the favourite haunt of a kingfisher. Delicious little sights were commonplace on the banks. The short reach seemed to have a particular attraction for all manner of animals. Voles were always to be seen. The water was lively with crayfish, stickleback, dace and other coarse fish, and with odd creatures such as *dyticus* and *acilius* beetles and water snails adhering to the locks of the water buttercup. These made as satisfactory "layers of shade" in the yellow stream as Tennyson's cedars about the lawn. A moorhen built a second nest, not for eggs but as a sitting-room for its young, under the shade of the biggest sycamore. One sweet-smelling summer evening, as we leant on the rail of the rough bridge we had thrown across the stream, we saw six baby swallows packed as closely as they could get on the twig of a red willow, and every few minutes the parents would feed them while on the wing, turn and turn about, without checking their flight. Such sights are "worth a king's ransom." War was clean forgotten, and at that time above others I had that common experience of remembering the war as a queer unpleasant gap in life, not at all as a consecutive and related experience. It became at once, in this green and pleasant land, an old unhappy far-off thing, best left to its own subversive muddle. One of my colleagues set forth to exploit his memories. That seemed to me, not in any way reprehensible, but

psychologically impossible. The young swallows forbade it. Perhaps I may quote a rough rhyme that I wrote (in the *Spectator*) just to indicate what pleasure just a bit of rippling water, of "murmuring sound" can keep alive.

By my little bit of river,  
Where the mirrored branches shiver,  
Herb of willow, willow, sallow,  
Hide the nests where moorhens hallo,  
Cluck and chatter to their chicks.

Fishes move from weedy holes.  
Hush! I see the busy voles,  
Pretty beasts, whose silken hair  
Prisons drops of silver air  
Munching sedge and playing tricks.

Such a little bit of river,  
Countless pleasures can deliver.  
Happy may I sit beside it,  
Where the elm trunk fell astride it,  
Till I cross the River Styx.

For two years the days flowed serenely by; but the "all-up"—as we said of regulated pauses in our cross-country runs at Shrewsbury—was not to last very long. In the spring of 1922 I went to spend a week end at Lady Northcliffe's most lovely cottage at Crowborough, and met there some delightful people, including Austen Chamberlain. Among memories of the spot are first, Chamberlain's almost irresistible desire to carry off little treasures from the Alpine house (for he was as keen and ruthless a collector of such things as Lord Kitchener of his hosts' china); second, the persistent churring of a nightjar on the gable roof over my bedroom.

On the Sunday Lord Northcliffe appeared, rather unexpectedly. It was understood that he was allowed to come to the cottage on condition that he did not bring more than one typewriter and one secretary. On Monday morning I was just getting into the going-away car when a maid hurried out and said: "Would you drive up to town with his Lordship?" Presently, in his most direct and abrupt manner, he said, without preface or warning, "I want you to go round the world." Everything was arranged with the usual celerity, including a large bunch of introductions from Lord Inchcape, to his scattered agents about the world and the captains of various liners bidding them to give me the best accommodation, the freedom of the bridge and, if desired,

loans of money. The budget reached my cottage by special messenger. Why I was to go round the world as representative of the British Empire, was not wholly clear. Lord Northcliffe had himself just completed such a tour, and I fancied he had a friendly desire that I should see much of what he had seen. Indeed, as I heard afterwards, he had said to a common friend while watching birds in New South Wales, "Beach Thomas ought to be here." At any rate the only emphatic instruction he gave me was to time my visit to New Zealand to fit the opening of the fishing season! Otherwise the terms of reference were a little vague. I was to make emigration and emigrants the thesis of weekly articles to the *Daily Mail* and any picturesque incidents I might come across an excuse for articles in the *Times*. "Remember," said Lord Northcliffe, "that adventures come to the adventurous." He liked to give his travellers a free hand. Only once, so far as I know, was the expense of such trips brought to his notice. On that occasion a Scottish manager complained to him of the exorbitant expenses sent in by a famous correspondent on the Continent. He replied with a scriggle written across the protesting letter: "Every *Daily Mail* special correspondent is expected to travel with at least two valets!" Personally, I preferred to travel alone, and with as little luggage as possible, though this was increased by a gun and a golf-bag—and a number of delightful games I played, especially by Vancouver and Sydney. The luggage ought to have been increased by a fishing rod.

The question arose which way round the world should I face; and it was decided by Lord Northcliffe's imperative wish that I must time my visit to New Zealand to fit the fishing season; so the first stage of the journey was from Liverpool to Halifax, by a new 20,000-ton Cunarder, the *Scythia*.

Has any part of the British Empire, of the Commonwealth of Nations, made so inadequate an appeal to the imagination of the British public as Eastern Canada, I mean in a scenic sense? With modern facilities for travel it is hardly more difficult of approach than Norway or Sweden; and the journey there is much the more pleasant. For myself I have seldom crossed the shallow North Sea and its sudden, petulant waves without either sickness or severe qualms; but have usually enjoyed every moment in crossing the deep and dignified Atlantic. Yet I do not know that I have ever heard of a mere holiday-maker selecting Eastern Canada for the sake of its holiday attractions. Why is this? Some part of the answer may be found in that extremely witty, but not very widely known classic, *Sam Slick*. The hero is a commercial traveller, and one of his favourite themes is the contrast between Eastern and Western Canada and their inhabitants. In his idiom British Columbians are all "boosters"

of their country and all Easterners are "knockers" of theirs. They belittle its virtues. I was to land there at a bad time of year, the spring thaw. Spring is open to the shafts of the satirist in many countries; but it is in some regards the crown of the year both among snow-covered mountains and in temperate England. In the Alps, in the Pyrenees and indeed in Siberia it bursts into a sudden glory like the flower of a yucca. Before you well know that the snow has melted the ground is bright with a hundred tiny flowers, and the roughest bit of ground is lovelier than our most carefully cultivated rock or alpine garden. The gradation of spring within Britain is less dramatic; but it has inspired every English poet and every English countryman with delight. Such is the desire of spring that Gilbert White and the Norfolk diarists could not resist finding "indications of spring" from November onwards. The arrival of the little warblers and their merry notes is one with the blooming of primroses, anemone, daffodil or blackthorn. The very rain has its succession of rainbows. Indeed the conclusion I draw from travel about the world is that the English climate is the best, especially in Spring. The winds of March are taken with beauty and April laughs its golden laughter. It is the worst season in Eastern Canada. When I set forth to visit country places there in May, it was necessary to get a special pass for leave to use a motor car on the roads, so ruinous was the thaw. Nevertheless, Spring excepted, the East of Canada may rival the West even in holiday charms; and before I left its farms and orchards and rivers (kept well supplied with trout from admirable hatcheries supported by Government funds) I endorsed the extravagant praise of a Scottish engineer who was a fellow passenger in the *Scythia*. He was making the journey for the seventeenth time and discoursed on the ignorance of the British sportsman. "If," he said, "you set Nova Scotia on end, they would think it was Norway." What a marvellous coast-line! What a sea for fish! What charming rivers and trout streams, quiet and homely, and yet here and there frequented by moose and bear. What farm-lands, purchasable outright at little more than double the rent of an English farm. A great deal of his enthusiasm seemed to me at this time, as at other visits, quite literally true. I was once staying in Toronto on the eve of the summer holiday season; and one acquaintance after another slipped out of the town with no fuss or great preparation to spend camping days up the rivers, in wild and lovely country almost at the doors of the towns. We have nothing like it in Britain or indeed in any part of Europe except Northern Scandinavia.

On a former visit I kept almost wholly to the towns, being intent on seeing people, among them Goldwin Smith who had been a great name among English historians and politicians. I had worked for a while on

the staff of the *Saturday Review*, which trailed fading clouds of glory from days when Goldwin Smith, with Lord Salisbury, had given it distinction. His career, unlike Lord Salisbury's, was ruined by his excess of idealism. He left Britain to seek fancied Utopias elsewhere, first in the United States, then in Canada, but found each fresh Utopia true to its derivation, a place that did not exist. However, his house and garden in Toronto made a lovely home, and his scholarship was regarded with a sort of hushed reverence by intellectual Canada. Into what a remote past a talk with him carried me; and in his old age and comparative disillusionment he kept his old scorn of modern things. He passed straight from tales of John Bright to an angry assault on the evil of this "new" game of association football, which threatened civilisation itself. On the other hand he astonished me by expressing an almost ecstatic admiration for the yet newer game of lawn tennis, which he had played in comparative old age. Oddly enough this old Liberal idealist nursed exactly the same prejudices in regard to such games as that bellicose Tory, Mr. Leo Maxse, whose passionate zeal for lawn tennis was only equalled by his hatred for the Germans and professional football.

Ottawa, like Toronto, was associated in my memory with a particular personality. On my first visit I arrived just after a long and difficult session of Parliament had been concluded and found Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the silver-voiced French Premier, in a state of happy relaxation. In the lovely library building, soon afterwards to be destroyed by fire, standing on the edge of the cliff-like hill above the river, he poured out his views on both present and future politics without any sort of reserve.

The date was just before the end of the Boer War, and it was commonly said that unless a French-Canadian had been in power great trouble would have ensued. These simple and charming country folk, the "Habitants" of Quebec, were in the deepest sympathy with the Boers. I had spent a little time in one of their remoter villages where the priest, as normally, was in complete dictatorial mastery over his flock; and he said to me that he feared Chamberlain would not be content till he had "*coupé la gorge à tous les Boers.*" A revolutionary movement for setting up "an independent republic on the banks of the St. Lawrence" was seriously discussed as a possibility. Such a danger, as well as the alleged movement for inclusion into the United States, was doubtless absurdly exaggerated; but Laurier was a statesman of a quality and a wisdom whom the British Empire should remember with gratitude. He was frank and oddly prejudiced against "the Americans." He did not like their use of that word as if they were the only Americans. "They are," he said, "a conceited people who think their government better than ours, and



it's not." Though a strong Roman Catholic he thought that one of the great dangers within Canada was the policy of the Church in buying up land while maintaining its privilege, accorded to all Church lands, of paying no taxes. "The time will come," he prophesied, "when trouble must ensue." His fidelity to the ideas of the British Empire seemed to me to be founded on gratitude and admiration for British tolerance in religious as in political concerns. I have never spoken with anyone whose conversational language had more charm. The easy and graceful idiom marked the orator, but he never gave the impression of making a speech, of the sort that Queen Victoria complained of in Gladstone.

Ottawa was built, like Canberra, as a compromise capital, but surely the compromise was justified? These four great eastern towns are all made lovely by their sites: Ottawa, Quebec, Toronto and Montreal. Ottawa, the smallest, has the right of a place beside the biggest, but if any town was forced into greatness by its geographical position it is Montreal with the well-treed hill looking down on the head-waters of the St. Lawrence open, though far inland, to the great ocean-going ships. Was there ever such a dispersal point? Yet the dreams of the great pioneers who drove two immense parallel railways across the continent have not yet been realised; and those who financed one of them have seen their money reach the vanishing point. When first I visited the continent every financier said confidently that the surest investment, if a really long view were taken, was the ordinary stock of the Grand Trunk Railway. At about the date when this advance in value was expected, not only the ordinary stock but most of the preference was cancelled by the Government. The population which was to feed the railway had not arrived. The promised age of gold dawdled insufferably.

What must first strike any visitor from an old country when he first sees such a town as Edmonton (or indeed in some slighter measure the much more populous city of Brisbane, the capital of Queensland) is the spacious extent and the small content. The houses that were to join east to west and north to south have not been built. The towns have a gaunt and disappointed air. They resemble growing children who have not filled out. The bones lack flesh. The growth of the towns depends in the last analysis on the growth of the country; and the chief reason why the Prairie Provinces of Central Canada, like the back blocks of Australia, are insufficiently peopled is the refusal of women to face the lonely life. There are more men than women in Australia—a strange detail in statistics—but in the towns, where half the population is gathered, there are more women than men. The back blocks are often womanless. Maybe a change is coming. When I reached Edmonton, the local paper

had just set up a broadcasting apparatus for the sake of remote pioneers and farmers. The Prairie Provinces, like the greater part of Australia, are made for aeroplane travel. Loneliness will soon be wholly cured as transport planes become like a bus service.

To an engrooved Englishman it is almost a shock to see for the first time shallow disc harrows hurrying across burnt stubbles preparatory to the sowing of yet another crop of wheat on the unploughed fields. Such farming cannot of course continue, and not only because the virgin soil becomes exhausted. Professor Robertson, whose genius informed the whole scheme, once showed me over the splendid agricultural college and research station just above Montreal; and among the prophecies he made was this: weeds would make single crop farming impossible. Already they had driven wheat farmers from district after district; and eventually they must make rotation and mixed farming of the European type compulsory. Such farming entails a homestead and the almost continuous work of a resident farmer. It is possible only in a more closely settled country. Yet with all their level emptiness the Prairie Provinces can exercise a strange charm. One of the most ideal farms I ever saw covered a wide space just north of Edmonton, and the wise farmer had planted clumps and belts of Canadian poplar, which grew very rapidly and served a host of useful purposes. The town itself, in spite of the unfilled spaces, had its inspiration. The day I got there a trainful of ardent pioneers was starting for the north-west, and it was impossible not to desire fervently to take a seat in it; for Edmonton is the gateway to the romantic gold-bearing north, as well as a centre of rich farms. Even by the town itself anyone out of work could go down to the river and tap its waters for gold dust. New rumours of gold in great quantity and near at hand had just floated south. People passed on all sorts of tales of the riches to be had in the north of Canada for the picking up. And indeed that very week had come quite practical corroboration of yet another settlement that had tapped and was beginning to use natural earth-born gas, always an indication of underlying oil. In the train were traders going north to do business with outposts of all sorts, Indians, Esquimaux trappers, and Hudson Bay officials. Some were going to Norman, where about five hundred oil claims had recently been pegged out. Some had twenty year leases along the banks of the Laird and Nahanni rivers and would spend the summer washing gold from "pay-gravel." Some ledges, they said, yield specks as big as wheat grains, and one nugget had been brought down. The majority were off to Aklavik, the most northerly point yet established on the Mackenzie River, a hundred miles inside the Arctic Circle. It gave one an intimate sense of the size of Canada to hear

that it was "only" fourteen days to the end of the railway and the midnight sun.

The winter, of course, is the great enemy to the farmer; and it is the north, not the tropics, that breeds the pernicious mosquito, which is one of the enemies of the rancher, who begins to multiply in Northern Canada, where stock fatten on native grasses as quickly as anywhere in the world. Ingenious attempts were being made to counter both the weather and the insect. Cattle turn their backs on the snow-storm and are apt to be overwhelmed. Buffalo, on the other hand, with their powerful breastplates face it, and flourish. One research worker had just succeeded in breeding a cross of the buffalo and Hereford, which he called a "cowlo," and hoped—I imagine vainly—that he had solved the trouble. Thompson Seton, who at one time held the post of official naturalist to one of the northern provinces, thought, so he told me, that he had found a valuable commercial animal in the yak, whose length of hair was a complete answer to the attack of most insects. When he desired to import some for experiment he found that the only available supply was in Woburn Abbey Park! What a wonderful place England is! And how ingenious the Englishman when it is a question of breeding animals! There is a story of a man who wished to buy a true Labrador retriever as a present to Mr. Holland Hibbert, later Lord Knutsford, who had done him great service. So he asked a friend who was touring Labrador to procure one. The friend asked, and asked in vain, till he was directed to a certain breeder who was said to know every dog in the country. The man replied at once: "If you want a good Labrador you had better apply to Mr. Holland Hibbert when you get back to England." I once asked Lord Knutsford whether the tale was true and he gave me the right version. The true quality of the Labrador, the nearest to perfection of all sporting dogs, was brought to birth, like many other good things, in the surroundings of an English country house.

Previous journeys had not taken me further east than Winnipeg. Now I was to have the chance of testing Sam Slick's contrast. Banff may be called the dividing line and the arrival there is one of the great moments in crossing Canada. The prairies, if rich and fertile, are by no means beautiful: Banff has no wealth of fertility, but is all beauty. That is its harvest; and a good one.

It is also a sanctuary—one of the world's greatest sanctuaries—as well as a tourists' paradise. On my first day there a great Canadian naturalist and alpinist took me, as he said, to "shake hands" with the mountain sheep. I had been brought up to believe that they were as wild as any animal on the sportsman's list. For the wild sheep is no sheep. He looks

like a deer, as trim and light of foot and as dainty, with all the senses singularly acute and alert.

After a drive of a very few miles, we came to a patch of pebbles at the foot of the slopes that lead to the snow-capped hills encircling this adorable plateau. You scarcely noted, at first, among the big variegated stones, that a little flock of sheep were using them as a place of siesta. The sympathy of colour between animal and stone was so close that at a distance the animals vanished clean into their environment. But they were not trusting to any concealment. Our arrival disturbed them not at all, because they did not regard man as an enemy; and I walked up within ten yards before they gave the least sign of nervousness.

The white-tailed deer are tamer still. My conductor's children regularly fed a few favourites from the hand, and persuaded one doe to come into the house and rifle the larder. While climbing in the woods I surprised one by my sudden arrival, and expected her to make off like a streak. She gave one slight start, but perceiving that I belonged to the quiet and kindly tribe of man, went on feeding as if there had been no interruption. Even the black bear, as in Yellowstone Park, come to the edge of the little township to grub about in the rubbish heaps. This tameness of the wild animals makes of Banff a "holy mountain." Its appeal is irresistible.

But there are snakes in Eden. It is not altogether surprising that animals of prey desire to break into this garden and disturb its peace. The game-wardens, who are men with a wonderful knowledge of woodcraft as of natural history, are troubled by the inroads of "mountain lion," who have entered the sanctuary to prey upon the sheep. This fierce and feline puma, or cougar, is as troublesome to herds in South America as in North.

I once sent out two foxhounds to a friend in the Argentine to help him run them down, not without success. The wardens say that the cougar, if pursued by two dogs, soon takes to a tree, where he is an easy victim, but will run much farther if only one is used. The most useful dog, because slow and very good on a stale scent, is said to be a cross between the Airedale and the bloodhound. Another unpopular beast is the wild goat, which, as in holy writ, does not consort with the sheep. The keepers of the sanctuary must take their choice between the sheep and goat in any given area. The two are real, as well as metaphorical, opposites.

One of the expected thrills of travel round the world is crossing the "Great Divide," the edge of the range after which the rivers begin to run west instead of east. Every step beyond it into British Columbia and out of Alberta opens a country as different from the one you have left as

two countries can be. People and problems, beasts and vegetation, seasons and cultivation, are poles apart—farther apart, perhaps, than is understood even in Ottawa. After all, in sheer distance Vancouver is as far from the capital as the Ural mountains from Paris.

British Columbia would make a tourist out of anyone. For a fortnight, just that and no more, I forgot all about Empire settlement and the goal of my mission, and plunged into the Selkirks in company with Mr. Byron Harman, a photographer working on behalf of the C.P.R., whose ambition was to photograph a grizzly in his native haunts. It was to be an incidental in his life-work of making a complete photographic survey of the Rockies and Selkirks.

Our company of four was to be made up by a Canadian guide and packer, George, and an ex-Austrian guide, Conrad, who had climbed and hunted in most countries in Europe, Asia, Australasia, and North America. Five pack horses carried us and our baggage, of which much the heaviest part was the photographic apparatus, to a camp in the Selkirks at an altitude of five thousand feet. As soon as camp was pitched we set forth to locate bear, though some preliminary observations had already been made by Conrad. It was clear at once that grizzly were about. They do not cover up their tracks. Unlike the black bear that begins the spring on a diet of medicinal grass, the grizzly, as soon as he emerges from winter quarters, has a passion for fleshy diet. He finds it chiefly in the gopher, which he attacks tooth and nail, especially nail.

I am sorry for the gopher. He is the most engaging of the rodents. You might easily mistake him for a bird as he twists his little black head this way and that before wholly emerging from his hole. He looks up to the heaven for fear of the hawk and eagle. He searches every neighbouring bush for fear of lurking dog or bear. He whets every sense before leaving the immediate protection of his burrow; and though he has no friends and a host of enemies, he flourishes and has a merry look.

The grizzly plays no feline tricks in hunting him. He just tears up the ground where his hole is, whatever its nature. We found one spot where stones weighing at least half a ton—Conrad estimated them at a ton—were scratched out as a hen scratches dust; evidence of the old claim that the grizzly is the very strongest of all the animals of the world.

We found places where he had recently scratched the fir trees and rubbed off his rough winter coat on the sticky resin. We found, too, many tracks and other signs, even the very spot where he had slept a night or two ago. But the grizzly was not doing as he ought. He ought at this date to have settled down to regular feeding on one or other of the "slides" or avalanche courses, where snow and water, falling annually

from the heights, sweep down bigger trees and larger growth and leave an open space where the grasses flourish. By one such slide, baited with things that delight the grizzly's palate, the cinema machine was installed behind its screen.

Tired of failing to come upon any of these travelling grizzlies, George and I set out on the fourth morning on a long journey to the next creek. We had not travelled more than half a mile when George, who had the eye of a hawk (or the eagle that I saw at an infinite height in the sky above the snow peaks), pulled up his horse and pointed across the stream. There, some hundreds of yards away, was a bear, but not the bear we sought. This domestic-looking creature, suggesting a certain picture of an ant-eater in a child's book of beasts, was an altogether ludicrous object beside the savage grizzly, with the irresistible grasp and wicked eyes, that lives in the imagination. He did not see us, but moving on in his groping way had slipped into the elder and poplar shrub by the time we had disengaged ourselves from our peaked Indian saddles.

We came back to camp about six o'clock, and very soon Conrad, who had a gift for cooking, had ready for us an excellent dinner. It included one smallish trout, caught, I regret to say, with a bit of rabbit's flesh on a hook like a harpoon. When it came to washing-up, Harman, who never shirked this domestic business, went down to the stream to get water. In half a minute he was back. "Bear," he whispered, and that was all. Then, "Get your rifles, it is too dark for the camera." It was nearly too dark for the rifle, but we hurried sinuously behind what cover there was to the water's edge.

There was our grizzly identified by his rather curious colouring; and just on the point of entering the scrub. It was perhaps two hundred yards or less away. I fired one shot and he fell. Harman shouted, "You've got him," and George was so certain that he withheld his shot. But grizzly recovered, and before we knew it was under cover of the scrub. George and Buster crossed the river, some twenty yards of it, and very rapid, but it was growing dark and the scrub was thick.

The tale is told. I saw no more grizzly and only one more bear. Though merely a black bear, and from its size a yearling, he is worth a word as illustrating the surprises of this amazing country. I had set out on the return to Windermere, and had walked about twelve miles, when I came to a small slide, blue as a bluebell wood in England, with forget-me-nots. I noticed only the flowers, but Conrad, more biologist than botanist, marked at the top, embowered in forget-me-nots, a black object that he knew to be a bear. He had brought a rifle, but the bear was young and the shot a long one. Besides, it would have been too ludicrous, altogether

too contrary to the laws of aesthetic propriety, to hunt a bear in a bower of forget-me-nots! It is not done, and I induced him not to fire.

The whole of that valley and thousands, perhaps millions, of acres thereabouts have been unhunted, almost unvisited, for years, except by an occasional trapper and an occasional prospector. On the upper hill we saw many wild goat, and Conrad spent the better part of a day in following the trail of a grizzly who had separated a goat from his fellows. He wished to prove whether or no the grizzly can or cannot hunt down the goat. But the task proved too long even for him.

What a country! Sitting one day on an inverted box in a long-since deserted log hut, I watched through a square hole in the wall a snowy peak turn ruddy in the light of the setting sun. It was of great height, and its outline was as attractive as the profile of the Matterhorn or Monte Rosa; and I asked Conrad, who was eating tinned tomatoes opposite, what was its name. "It has no name," he alleged. Why should so common a thing have a whole name to its own cheek? Canada, and above all the Rockies and that subsidiary chain, the Selkirks, is compacted of unnamed and unknown glories such as this. Something I know of the Alps in summer and winter, something of the Pyrenees; here are thousands of miles of Alps and Pyrenees, populous, specially between the Rockies and Selkirks, with wild beasts, with bear, elk, moose, mountain lion, goat, sheep and deer. Not all Western Canada is boasted.

In regard to the mountain goats, which are usually very much aloft, at first I was utterly unable to see them, till the very spot was pointed out. Then, when I grew used to the sort of shape and colour that were to be looked for, I could pick out the goats without any trouble at long distances. It is curious how blind one can be in a strange place, and how soon one can acquire sight. We see what we expect to see, and are blind to the unknown. No one so often feels the truth of this as the naturalist. The more learned he is in sights and sounds, and even scents, the more salient and the richer grows the land he lives in.

We discovered one day, and ascended, a thin trail worn at a forgotten date by some valiant prospector, who found silver and lead and copper visibly outcropping on the summits. These lonely, hopeful pioneering spirits leave their traces like pristine hieroglyphics in the most lonely regions, and in a country extravagantly rich in minerals their tribe is large. After the better part of a day's work spent in clearing the trail, we started up it with three pack horses laden with cinema apparatus, needed in the upper ranges where the goats abide. It was nothing to these burdened horses on a slope of one in two to step over fallen trees up to a yard high. They clambered, themselves like goats, through the

thick woods, over "slides" of shale and rubbish and through scrub. The most skittish once ran amok in some unusually thick snow, among which it fell and floundered, but, taking a line of its own, it presently joined the procession and became docile as its companions.

We lunched on the timber line, where there was still enough wood to make a fire and snow to fill the kettle. The panorama of the peaks above the vegetation was gorgeous, even beside the memories of the Pyrenees. In the mosaic of the valley below our hut, and tents looked "scarce so gross as beetles," and the broad "slides" were no more than corridors guiding to the immense circle of snow peaks, nameless, unsung and unsurpassed.

And the flowers! Here at the very top, or near it, was only one tiny but delicious yellow sedum, so cunningly placed in the crevices as to defy the ingenuity of the greatest artist at the Chelsea Show. A little lower down was a large white saxifrage, and lower yet, but among the snow that its leaf and petals melted, as gay a patch of "avalanche lilies" as the daffodils in front of Tennyson's house in the Isle of Wight.

In spite of more dramatic subjects Harman could not resist them, and took both "close-up stills" and "movies" of the golden scene. The flowers are large, of an amazingly vivid yellow, and their habit of growing two or three on a stalk thickens the weight of colour, and seems to melt the snow by its visible flame. A large woolly-leaved anemone, masses of the Indian's paintbrush, purple clematis and ladies' fingers were among the other flowers that we carried home.

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The chief trouble in British Columbia is the fascination of its scenery, which has doubled, trebled and quadrupled the value of the land in cultivable areas. It is difficult to make a living there because so many want to live on it.

The most sudden surprise any traveller could desire is to emerge by the Kettle Valley railway (near the American border) into Melopolis, the apple capital. The train that has been miraculously steered past the crags and chasms of an impossible country of rock and forest, slips without warning into a valley bridal throughout its length and breadth with pear, peach, and apple blossom. The two little townships at the southern end of the lake are well christened Summerland and Peachland.

The Okanagan, the rolling fields and flat plains on the side of the lake and radiating valleys, is probably the best fruit valley in the world, and at that date land had risen to values not reached even in the agricultural fringe of London. I was offered an orchard at the price of £250 an acre;



and had to reply that I could buy good land in beautiful Buckinghamshire, twenty miles distant from the best market in the world, for £20 an acre.

Not only fruit land was dear. I went to stay with an English colonel; he was in dungarees, handling a sprayer. Just below his house Hindus and Chinese were travelling on their knees in the dust, in the work of cultivating onions on land they had hired at eight pounds an acre. West of his house, over thousands of acres of rolling foothills, fit for cultivation but quite uncultivated, ruled some twenty Red Indians, the relics of the tribes for whom the vast tract is reserved. They hunt a little, farm a little—a very little—grumble, grow weak, and look muddily picturesque, a rather burdensome survival of the once masterful people, who controlled the forests, streams and lakes in unchallenged isolation.

A census has been taken of the wealth of these immigrants from across the Pacific, who have supplanted the natives, and it revealed a gift for accumulation scarcely imagined even by the bankers. Nor is it wholly individual thrift. The Japanese, if not the rest, are not neglected by their nation. Just before my arrival a Japanese consul visited one of these pretty townships on the Okanagan lake. The local Japanese gave him a dinner of honour, to which were asked selected employers of Japanese labour and some important men of the place. The givers of the dinner did not sit down to it, preferring to play the part of waiters, but when it was over they were asked to sit down and smoke.

The Consul asked the employers a succession of quite direct questions. Had they found the Japanese workman honest? Hard-working? Obedient? Capable? "Yes," was the only possible answer to each several query. When the interrogation was over the Consul, still speaking English, said in his naïve Japanese manner, that he had previously asked the Japanese somewhat similar questions about their employers; and finally he preached them a little sermon on the duty of working, working, working, not on behalf of themselves, but on behalf of the nation to which they still belonged.

Such is one, perhaps not wholly insignificant, episode in the relations of the Japanese to their emigrant workers. The people have large families, get possession of more land, and cultivate it to the hilt, and have a pre-eminence in sea-fishing. The orchards of the Okanagan know them as well as the intensive fruit-gardens of the Fraser Valley.

Vancouver has many peculiar charms. The social habit that most appealed to me was the evening bathing. A huge bonfire of pine, which is nothing accounted of, is lit on the beach; and round it gather the youth of Vancouver, male and female, clad in similar and regulation bathing kit. They swim and diye, and then race over the sands to the pine-fire,

which scents the whole length of the shore. When I first reached the spot a very red sun was setting behind a gorgeous seascape, and its disc took on new tawny hues through the flames and smokes of the enormous fire.

It is a local debating point whether Vancouver City yields the palm for "liveableness" to Vancouver Island. As a holiday island it is not surpassed even by Honolulu. I doubt whether you could find anywhere in the world holiday spots of more natural charm, where the wild and the tame shake hands so friendlily. The wooden but luxurious inns on the Cowishan river or lake offer everything that a searcher after rest could desire, especially if he is a fisherman. There, as in Vancouver, the smell of pine is pervading, night and day. The smell filled the house as well as the woods when, in the evening, the hundredweight logs were put on the open grate, that the fishermen might dispute at their ease till such time as they stopped to listen to the "Canadian Band," the amazing clatter of the amorous frogs by the river's edge.

Retreat to such places as this, beyond the railways, but in touch with something like luxury as well as nature, is the privilege of all Canadians who have a penny to spend, and some who have not. In a country vast beyond arithmetic and immensely various, this sort of retreat is a common possession from Nova Scotia to Vancouver Island. When May comes till autumn dies, business men slip off to the sides of river or lake and live the open life in stenes quite unspoiled by civilisation, but yet within reach of its comforts.

But in climate at any rate Vancouver Island takes the palm. Victoria, the capital, and indeed Vancouver, are curiously like Stockholm. There is the same friendliness between land and water, the same pretence of the sea to be a lake, the same pine-covered islands. But in many ways Vancouver Island has no rival anywhere in the world for equable delights. It is, of course, a place to enjoy rather than to profit by, and yet the place in it that gave me most satisfaction, more even than the inn by the river, was designed to yield profit as well as enjoyment. It was a farm bought by a manager of one of the C.P.R. hotels, with the object of proving that such farms could pay, if plenty of capital was well expended, and would provide the best and most enjoyable life for a retired man of business. He was proving his point. It is a wooden farm-house delightfully teed-up among Douglas firs. Strange, steep, narrow ridges of stone run down to the junction of river and sea, with salved water-meadows between them. I walked down one of them with the farmer, who carried a gun to destroy, if it might be, one of the carrion crows that was attacking his chicks. As we returned we met two of his guests who had been

searching for clams on the beach. Of one of the two he gave me a potted biography, a wonderful tale of the enterprise of Canadian womanhood.

The younger—she looked hardly out of her college days—was a famous horse-woman. She had been “a star reporter” on one of the chief papers in the Dominion, and during the war had driven a motor ambulance in Serbia, where, under heavy fire, she had carried wounded men on her back from the battlefield to the ambulance. She looked like a boy in her sailor blouse and with her short hair—a remnant of her Serbian experience—and active movements.

But her talk was of womanly things. Her theme for the moment was the necessity of offering to woman immigrants a short course of domestic economy in the peculiar needs of a Canadian home. She held that half the immigration question would be solved if knowledge of conditions in different districts could be made more easily available in London.

While we walked and talked we were continually surprised by the sound of loud explosions. They suggested to me my last visit to France, where the engineers were still exploding the “dud” shells. The devastation here was the destruction of the stumps of trees with dynamite cartridges.

The explosions signified the bringing of more land under cultivation. But let no one think that dynamite makes easy or cheap this beneficent work. It seems to be agreed that the Italians, with their invincible native genius for engineering, can remove bigger stumps with less dynamite than anyone else, but even in their hands the work is neither easy nor quick where the stump areas are so heavy as in this country of towering firs. You reclaim by the sweat of your brow, and in no other way whatever. Yet the labour is worth every drop, if you have the money and the time. Both are needed.

Just before I left England a general, with other signatories, had written to *The Times*, complaining of Vancouver Island as a home for Englishmen. I sought him out but missed him, and saw instead a neighbour, a hard-working woman who emigrated from England twelve years ago, and had made a success of life. She gave me a delightful description of the methods of the retired officer who had complained that his farm did not pay. “He drives,” she said, “his Rolls-Royce into the market with a dozen eggs, carries forty cents back to his palace, and in the evening, after his game of tennis, writes to the British papers to say that farming does not pay.”

The position on the mainland is not much unlike that on the island. Land is dear—£80 it may be, even £100, an acre for the best bits—but in certain places very fertile. The intensive gardens of small fruit—straw-

berries and raspberries especially—along the Fraser river are models of high cultivation, many cultivated by Chinese and Japanese, and they yield big returns. They even export fruit pulp to England for jam-making. The dairies, too, earn dividends. But here, as elsewhere, profits come by the sweat of the brow and by skilful cultivation. Only the workers win; and immigrants from across the Pacific are hard competitors on the land as they are in the fisheries. It sometimes seems that those whose standard of life is lowest are capable of the hardest work. What a persistent race are the Japanese! and they have no desire whatever for *bien être*. Their hours of work are almost all their life. At the same time they cannot quite rival the bouts of energy put forth by some of those who nurse a high standard of life. The hardest, quickest, most effective work I saw during my journey round the Empire was put forth by Australian sheep-shearers and Australian cutters of sugar cane, who were earning more than a pound a day and would not have worked for less. In war, at any rate, the people of a high standard of life will be too strong for those of a low standard, in spite of the hardship of supply. They possess in their minds and bodies what may be called a strategic reserve.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN



# Home from the Antipodes



*The brilliant chief, irregularly great,  
Frank, haughty, rash.*

The New Timon    BULWER LYTTON

**I**T is really very difficult to escape from the British Empire. In a year's tour I only left it twice, and that momentarily, once at Honolulu and once at Marseilles.

Honolulu is an American holiday ground, as well as a great naval centre. Though it is one of the remotest places in the world, over one thousand miles from anywhere, and still possesses districts of wild beauty, it is a place where people dress for dinner, play golf, and travel by motors, which abound, along excellent roads through highly cultivated fields. Like other Pacific islands, especially Fiji, it is singularly free from the disadvantages of the tropics in the form of diseases to plant and man. Neither mosquito nor malaria is a menace. Indeed the tropics, as discovered from a ship crossing the Pacific, are almost temperate. The only thing that seemed to me too hot at Honolulu was the sea.

It was in the nature of a relief to wriggle your body on to one of the surf-boards (heavy, broad planks, slightly rounded underneath) and to paddle it forwards with your hands, instead of being completely covered by the warm waters. But if the climate surprised by its moderation, the tropical splendour impressed by its excess. I have never experienced such a *coup de théâtre*, such a difficulty in believing that the real was real, and not some phantasmagoria of scene-shifting. A few smooth revolutions of the wheel transport you from the commonplace of an ordinary American city into what shall I say? The Arabian nights, the grove of Mycerinus, or any eastern dream. We talk in England of flaming June, not inaptly; but our brightest flowers pale their ineffectual fires beside these orange hedges, these scarlet hibiscus, these flaming trees. "It is not a landscape; it is a bonfire," a fellow-traveller said when we reached the Pali Heights, beyond all question one of the master views of the world.

The volcanic cliffs are impossibly scenic, the sea an incredible gradation of blues and purples, and between them lies a mottled plain, blue where

the pine-apples show, red where the rare earth appears, and yellow-green where nature is left alone.

At the same time as you grow aware of this lavish glory of tropical growth, you find it peopled with an amazing epitome of races "wearing the burnished livery of the sun." Hawaiians, Japanese, Chinese and Polynesians of various origins. Colour is rampant on land, on sea, especially under the sea. You see the strange fish-creatures only in the corridors of an aquarium, but their shapes and colours are so incongruously lavish that they leave you, as the country leaves you, quite overwhelmed with the sense of the luxuriance, the spilt splendour of the new world you have mysteriously reached. They are so coloured, you would swear, not for any Darwinian reason, but just because colour is part of the being of land and water.

Soon after leaving the Hawaiian Islands, the flower of the North Pacific, the Captain of our good ship, the *Makura*, showed me a letter that had reached him in Honolulu. It contained the sequel to the most singular story in the region of psychic things that ever I heard or imagined. It fitted well the mystery of the islands.

Honolulu itself has taken us back to the "golden days of good Haroun-al-Raschid," surprised us with its wonders, but the Captain's letter touched a remoter date, a more surprising miracle.

A British lady, Mrs. B——, who lived with her family in one of the Pacific islands, where her grandfather was a missionary, received, so she believed, strange communications from persons who lived in distant lands and in a remote century. In the summer of 1922 she was a passenger on the *Makura*, and the captain of the ship, hearing some rumours of her psychic powers, asked her whether she would care to make an experiment before him. She agreed to try, and one day sat down at his desk with a pen in her hand. While her husband and the captain sat together looking at a book on Samoa, she waited for her hand to be directed, without any greater concentration than, say, the wireless operator exercises when he prepares to receive a message.

After a while she ejaculated with irritation: "What a nuisance! I have got back to this Eastern writing." Lately on several occasions she had found herself writing a strange script. It looked to me to be largely in straight lines, set in abrupt angles, and the pattern vaguely suggested to herself and others a Chinese document. After writing for some twenty minutes she gave the manuscript to the captain, who determined to seek an interpreter and probe the mystery. The first people he showed it to were some Indians, who had come on a political mission to Fiji; but they could make nothing of it. When the captain reported his failure to Mrs.

B—— she expressed disappointment, adding: "I suppose there is nothing in it."

A little later, Professor G——, one of the great archeologists or the world, was a passenger on the same ship, and the manuscript was shown to him, without comment. He at once poured out excited questions and then gave his surprising verdict. The writing was a very good example of "Hieratics," which was a form of the hieroglyphics used by Babylonian priests up to about 3000 B.C. in Asia Minor. Only a handful of people now alive can read the script, and the professor did not think that anyone could have written the document in the short time taken by Mrs. B——.

The message began by thanking the lady for having got into communication, and went on to describe how differently people travel now and then giving a quaint picture of the contrasted motions of a camel and a ship. At the end was an accurate description of the captain's cabin and of the state of sky and sea at the moment.

The letter delivered to the captain on this voyage contained a further communication in the same script, and this too went to the professor for translation, who was, with the help of books, accurately and in detail, translating the first manuscript. I saw the second manuscript and heard the story with the full names of the people concerned. The evidence has been sifted in a scientific spirit, and none of the three in any sense of the phrase, is professionally psychic, neither the professor, who is a man of science, nor the captain, who is a Scottish New Zealander, with no psychic prejudices whatever, nor the lady, who is the mother of a large family, and deprecates any claim to supernatural powers. She has no conscious knowledge whatever of Hieratics.

What does it all mean? It surpasses fiction, is more surprising and dramatic than even Kipling's *Finest Story in the World*. Will it have a disappointing sequel? For myself it is the only story of the sort that so much as inclined me to a serious view, for the very simple reason that it is difficult to find any loophole for incredulity.

Wherever you are in the British Empire you meet enthusiasts on emigration. I very nearly missed my ship at Vancouver, because of an urgent message from Miss Christabel Pankhurst. She talked solid migration and would have continued indefinitely. Her Woman's League was going up by leaps and bounds, her hopes ran high of emptying Britain of its two million "superfluous women"; and she was looking forward to alliance with Lord Northcliffe. I am afraid that the next twenty years brought scant fulfilment of her ardent ambitions. The superfluity increases.

On the *Makura* was travelling the most downright statesman in the

Empire, Sir Henry Barwell, whom someone called the Mussolini of South Australia. He was later to be a very popular Agent-General in London. His first zeal was migration. Ever since he announced his scheme for finding homes in Australia for six thousand British boys he had been beset by eager applicants and inquirers. At the Langham Hotel in London, he received fifteen thousand letters within a week or two from boys and girls (and one from a girl, who, as she said, had successfully passed herself off as a boy for the last twelve years); and even Australia House could not cope with the correspondence. How comes it about that such general and undoubted zeal has achieved the most meagre results? Indeed emigration dwindles.

All the way across Canada Sir Henry was met with enquiries from provincial governments, from journalists, from parents, from children; Ontario had decided to follow his example. Wireless messages found him on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The Fijians, of whom several were on board, are not less eager on the same subject. Their island is a glorious place, especially rich in fruits; and one of the residents sent on a wireless message to provide us with every sort and variety. It was a disaster that "fish" was substituted for "fruit" *en route*; for the fish had been hard to get and the meal provided was one of the dullest and nastiest I ever ate. However, even without special advantages we could not go the round of species of fruits set on the table. For myself, from the date of that meal, I have always plumped for papaia, which looks like a melon and has seeds that taste like capers. As a prelude to any meal it is incomparable. As to the bread fruit, which some have lauded, it was as dull as the fish.

A journey across the Pacific stands out in my memory as the ideal holiday. Every island has different charms; and all seemed to breed races of singular beauty. It is a nice question whether the tall, lithe, upright Fijians or the Maoris, among whom we found ourselves at the next stopping place, are the finer race or the happier. How greatly superior are both to the dwindling native races of Australia and less markedly of North America!

The journey ended at the greatest harbour in the world, if Rio be excepted, but I had thought Auckland as beautiful though not, of course, so deep and various as Sydney. On landing there the first letter I received was from an English carpenter and his wife. She had been nurse to my children, had married and emigrated from a Hertfordshire village ten years earlier. The letter spoke of "our beautiful sunshine." I found later that they had good reason for the sense of ownership in their adopted country. They had £2,000 in the bank, a charming house, pleasant



neighbours, good education for the children, and what they thought a delicious climate.

Interviewers, the one bane of travel within the Empire, besieged me in Australia as in Canada; and speeches on migration were demanded right and left. Well. It was the first object of my journey, but it was my desire to visit the "back blocks" in all the States, not to chatter to clubs. How can a man talk of migration in the abstract? It presents different features in every state, and in different regions in each state. To give one example of the contrasts: three ideal farm units were quoted to me in different places. The cotton men of Queensland spoke of small-holders flourishing on ten acres. The sheep-men of the same state laid it down as a maxim that the minimum was ten thousand acres. The mixed farmers of New South Wales and Western Australia advised a thousand acres as the amount best suited to a single man. But in no country are the towns, which absorb most of the male, and nearly all the female population, harder to escape.

One of the back blocks where I most enjoyed hospitality was no less rural a place than the alleged capital, Canberra. In one of the oldest station- or farm-houses Captain Charles Bean had set up a factory of war history; and along with a photograph expert, a verifier and other useful assistants, was "powdering away," as Dickens used to say, at the official history of the 1914-1918 war. It proved at least a twelve-year job. He was writing two or three thousand words a day with his own hand; and was receiving all possible help from his employer, the Federal Government. You would have thought he was a person of some national importance, and would have been right. But he lived with no servant. He and his wife washed up after every meal. The lights, among other equipment, were of the worst; but of all this, Australian simplicity took no heed. It never seemed to occur, to Bean that he should demand any particular comfort or facilities for himself. Perhaps his work, which is very good, was none the worse for his simple life. Certainly his hospitality was not. My few days there were red-letter days. It was wholly astonishing to find in his garden English goldfinches hobnobbing with yellow-crested cockatoos.

In the train on the way to Queanbeyan I met General White, who was recognised in the war as one of the best of the staff officers in France. He quoted Bean as the bravest man he had met. Other people had to go where shells fell. Bean chose to go there whenever he could, whether in Gallipoli or, as I knew, in France. His industry was even more remarkable. He brought back between thirty and forty large notebooks, filled with

his day-by-day diary, kept on the spot, and often filled up under fire. The Federal authorities set such store by them that they ordered the whole library to be multiplied by a photographic process. Their possession has given rare life to the enormous record of the adventures of the Australian army. The history is perhaps the best of all the war histories.

Bean expressed delightful enthusiasm for the new capital, which he saw with the eye of faith. What he could show me was at that date little more than a site. It is beautiful, but all the contours of the hills had quite defied the *a priori* plans of the town planners. If the first Lutyens plans had been literally followed a certain proportion of the roads would have been in cuttings or on embankments.

Australian hospitality is far reaching as well as quick. I was asked to stay on a very remote Queensland sheep station, where the manager, Mr. Gauk-Rodgers, had heard, over I don't know how many thousand miles, that his hobby was my hobby. He managed sheep, but studied wild birds. I accepted, but found great difficulty in escaping from Brisbane, where everyone wanted me to see cotton and talk cotton. The people were cotton mad, for a short while. The dreams faded, not because the country was unsuitable for the crop, but because labour was too dear.

When I went to see Mr. Theodore, the Premier of Queensland, he had just one book on the table beside him. It was *Pugh's Almanac* for 1862, in which he had underlined a passage about the first experiment in cotton grown in Queensland. A sample of the first plant had been taken to Manchester and to Scotland; but it was of such superfine texture that it defeated the spinners, and was finally taken to India, where the natives converted it into the finest stuff ever made there. The next day I went to see the Governor, who marched straight to his shelves the moment I entered, and took down a small book, and showed me therein very much the same account that Mr. Theodore had found in the almanac.

My first caller in Brisbane showed me a score of samples of cotton. Later an enthusiast for close cultivation spent hours in demonstrating to me that cotton was the ideal small-holder's or family man's crop, that children are the best pickers. The record, he said, is held by a girl of twelve, and the work is light. No more than five months after the seed is in the ground the harvest begins. The whole process, from sowing to marketing, is thus completed in half the year, even if the plants are treated as annuals.

A botanist pointed out to me on a map how Queensland alone (which is five and a half times as big as the British Isles) has over a million acres where cotton grows better than in any part of the world, except some of

the irrigated areas of the Sudan and Egypt. The cotton boom resembled a gold boom in hopeful intensity. The eight thousand acres grown that year were to be seventy-five thousand the next; and infinitely larger when there was enough Australian-grown seed of the long-fibred varieties to go round.

Mr. Theodore, whose highly socialistic philosophy has made Queensland the one single chamber state in the continent, was an interesting personality. He had taught himself literature, and perhaps it was this training that had given him an open mind. He assured me that he had quite surrendered any views that went contrary to Empire Settlement. He even said that if a people could not populate a country they had no right to prevent other people from occupying it. It was a very cheering sentiment from a politician of his complexion.

But wool, not cotton, is the foundation of Australian prosperity; the real Australia is pastoral, and its best expression is the sheep station. The train by which I travelled towards the famous sheep country of Western Queensland is sometimes called "the Turkey Express." The origin of the name is an alleged habit of the officials of stopping the engine when they observe a bustard, or wild turkey, raising its head above the grass or between the pillared ant-heaps. They are common and provide an easy target even for an engine driver in a hurry.

The express, which travelled at about fifteen miles an hour, took me to the edge of the open gigantic plains where flourishes the master animal of Australia, the merino sheep, and to the lovely homestead of the Yorkshire naturalist. On our natural history expeditions, which we made daily, we took little heed of the roads, we birds'-nested, not on our feet but on the car, which took to the grass, and indeed threaded bushes, without any demur whatever. The experience was curiously novel. One morning we ran between a mother emu and her brood; and as the young made off we set off straight across country in pursuit of the fugitive clutch. After half a mile an awkward scoop in the ground pulled us up just as one of the chicks, who had kept up an amazing speed, fell over a stick. We continued the chase on our feet, but the chick recovered and then we gave up, breathless, for it was still gaining on us. This was by no means the only animal we pursued in a car. A little while after our defeat by the emu, we separated a young kangaroo from its mother, and made some pretence to keep the two apart. The mother stopped within a hundred yards and never evinced any alarm for herself, and within four or five minutes the young one made a great circle round us, and the two slipped into the bush together. It was not until the return journey that we witnessed the speed and dash of which these most

Australian creatures are capable. Eight or nine, one of them a very big red kangaroo, crossed the alleged road in front of us. Just at first, alert and watchful, they bounded slowly across, easily taking the road at one leap, in an upright position, the tail lashing the ground with every jump. It was interesting to see how their peculiar gait enabled them to dodge standing, and to clear fallen, timber. Then, when they were clear of us and the little bit of scrub, their heads went down and their tails went up, and they were taken out of sight at a speed that would test a car on a good road.

Once my companion drove the car in a circuitous course into the bush in search of perhaps the strangest spectacle in the economy of birds. He was looking for a bower bird's bower or playground, and in the sequel showed me two beautiful specimens, one newly furbished up. The bower itself is a real imitation tuft of grass bent into a circular corridor nearly joining up at the top. In one case a real tuft of grass was on one side and a composed tuft on the other. As a rule, this grass tunnel looks east and west—a discovery made by my host. Well outside the bowers, and at both ends, is spread and piled—often a bushel of it—a collection of anything bright that takes the bird's fancy. One of the heaps we inspected was chiefly composed of the bleached vertebrae of sheep and pieces of coloured grass, not promiscuously thrown down, but collected in colour groups. I noticed also a piece of telegraph insulator, a button, and a small tin or two. It is surprising that the spotted bower bird, who spends so much care and skill on his playground, builds the slightest and most slovenly nest, not much unlike our pigeons at home.

Before he manœuvred the car—a powerful Vauxhall—out of the bush, my chauffeur-naturalist showed me a whistling eagle on the nest and a considerable number of native birds. The species are extraordinarily numerous. The very lovely garden of the station house we had left swarmed with birds, big and little, and all fairly tame. Kites, birds as big as eagles, circled perpetually over the yard. Two “native companions”—very large herons—would scarcely move out of the way of the car as we left. The trees swarmed with bower birds, sailor birds, peewees, wagtails and many others. I saw over fifty species within two days. One of the loveliest sights was a flock of rose-breasted parrots, which enjoyed the neighbourhood of the house; and a very pretty green parrot, as well as a black and white shrike, was in the habit of taking tea with the household on the verandah.

A sudden happy zeal for bird protection has taken possession of Queenslanders. Rockhampton—where also prospects for cotton cultivation were thought to be bright and immediate—is encircled with spacious sanc-

tuaries, and never in my life, not even in the Duke of Bedford's sanctuary by Woburn Abbey, did I see anything like such quantity of water birds. The shores of the lake by the Botanic Gardens were lined with duck of seven or eight species. Egrets, black swan, shag and ibis abounded. I saw at very close quarters that curious creature, the lotus bird or Jacana, whose huge feet enable him to walk on top of the leaves of the purple lily. Pelican, spoonbill, geese, dotterel, tern, coot, grebe, stilt, heron, kingfisher, Gould harrier and the whistling eagle were some of those we marked down within half an hour, and we scarcely needed the glass for identification. The last bird I put up on leaving Queensland was a bustard or wild turkey. He was walking very sedately and unsuspiciously with head and shoulders above the long grasses. When I got down from the car and moved towards him he consented to rise at some twenty yards distance, and flew slowly some two or three hundred yards. Any engine driver or even stoker could have done murder.

The best record in hospitality was surpassed when at last I reached Western Australia. A private train was sent from Perth to Kalgoorlie; and I was told the Upper House had been adjourned for ten days in order that a particular minister might travel through the country with me and unfold its charms! He proved to be Mr. Colebatch, who had been acting Premier while Sir James Mitchell was in England, and was soon to be Agent-General in London. If other statesmen in Australia possess his charm and intellect, the quality is at least as good in our antipodes as at home. And how well he played bridge, even when he went no trumps before sorting his cards, and his record in chess matches between London clubs was very hard to beat.

On the little private train, with a truck behind for the motor car, we travelled for a fortnight throughout the south-west corner of Western Australia, on either side of a diagonal line drawn from Albany, that lovely natural harbour, to Perth, and the very artificial harbour of Fremantle. The country will always remain in my mind as one of the gems of Empire. It has all the advantages: rainfall, rivers, inlets, forests of incomparable timber, depth of soil; and botanically it is richer in wild flowers than any corner of the world. Indeed Western Australia is said to contain some 80 per cent of the classified species of wild flowers of the world; but, however this may be, the variety overwhelms you; and the blues are such pure blues, and the reds so true that you would swear you never before had sight of just those tints. Their splendour takes by storm even the people of the lusty mining town. Flower-picking is so popular a pastime at the height of spring that old and young, men and women, go out by the train-load to gather flowers. They return em-

bowered in bouquets as gorgeous as you could collect, say, from the beds of Hampton Court.

The private gardens in the hills behind Adelaide contain an incredible mixture of the flowers of warm and cold countries. I saw one rock covered with *lithospermum prostratum* on the northern side of a palm, and sweet peas flowered in front of an orange tree in fruit. But these are in part borrowed beauties. Of natural and native wild flowers no surface in the wild world, perhaps, is so lavish as the highlands behind Perth. There are rock gardens and flower borders and annual beds and rough gardens among flowering shrubs and trees quaint and lovely beyond the gardener's art. Scientific students are few, and the country very empty even in the districts described as settled. What a holiday a botanist could spend between Kalgoorlie and Perth! September, October and November would be his harvest months.

We met some mild but curious adventures in traversing this southwestern corner of the country. Once our car was hopelessly bogged; and I walked on in search for help. I was told that I might have to walk twenty miles before seeing a person or habitation; but the warning was not justified. Within an hour I came to a station owned by a Mr. Saw. As I approached his door, and before I had time to begin my apologetic explanations, the owner hailed me by name and called out his daughter, who said she had been a nurse under my brother in France during the war!

Were ever any people more simple and direct in word and action? These isolated farmers had at once inferred who I was, had understood, as if they had anticipated it, what the situation was, and instantly made preparation for our relief and entertainment. A son trotted off with a horse and a rope; and by the time the car arrived a meal of cold kangaroo, which resembles very rough and tasteless beef, with other very much better food, was ready for us.

We were begged to stay the night. Beds were already prepared; but we had promised to reach the outpost home of Mr. Boulanger, a Frenchman who had retired to a most lovely and lonely hilltop farm for the sake of health, both of body and mind.

We reached it after further adventures about midnight, and left at five the next morning. But Madame Boulanger, as energetic as charming, was up before us, and had prepared us a breakfast of asparagus tops and scrambled eggs! It was as good as a breakfast can be. A year later I retailed its delights to Mr. Cherry Garrard, a neighbour in England who had been with Scott's South Polar expedition. He had a parallel to my super-breakfast. Very weary and hungry, one of their party found an old store of dried mushroom powder; and this they cooked with scrambled

penguins' eggs; and that was the best breakfast he could remember; and has been vainly seeking for similar mushroom powder ever since!

A message was to reach us at the Boulangers' house as to the probability of progressing farther. Two horsemen had been dispatched for this purpose from the other end. They had come and gone, and left behind, on a scrubby morsel of paper, this pregnant sentence: "Roads every [sic] bad." We were forced to return by very much the same way as we had come by.

We met delightful characters along the route. An old white-bearded man told us his life-history. He had brought up a family of twelve, who were all "born and bred" in the hollow of a great tree. I shall never forget the exuberant hospitality of Mrs. Pickles, a Lancashire emigrant, who with her husband possessed seventy acres planted with peaches, apricots and oranges. They possessed also behind the house two thousand acres of forest of sorts and the family spent leisurely hours in "ring-barking" the higher trees, thus letting in the light, encouraging the grasses and thereafter multiplying wandering flocks. "Bother England," said Mrs. Pickles, when I asked whether she was ever homesick. She had found comparative wealth and a life of productive activity on her "Denmark" farm that Lancashire could never have given her.

We spent a day or two at Pemberton in the great karri forest, one of the sights of the world. I had seen a good deal of logging, of timber-cutting in the forests and woods of Europe and Newfoundland; but had met nothing comparable with the appearance of the hardwoods growing on this southern coast. The jarrah, the rich red wood of which much London pavement was once made, is a notable tree, and the wood wonderfully durable. It defies the attacks of the ants, of water and moulds. It will endure for a generation as a fence post or even as a railway sleeper; its stately trunk suggests the sternness of its inner quality. It makes beautiful furniture, and I much treasure a bowl of it, a leaving gift. Later, when a most desirable site on the west side of a Hertfordshire Common was offered me, and the temptation to build a small house there proved irresistible, I had the main room paved with jarrah; and very well its rich colour and hard polished surface served their purpose.

But as a pillar of the forest even the jarrah yields to the karri, though this has a much more vulnerable texture of wood. In the forest near Pemberton, where the government had built a township for its woodcutters, we stopped near the base of one of these silver giants along with a group of woodmen, who discussed its height. The tree was bigger than the average, but not one of the biggest. Two lean and wiry Australians stood on a platform some ten feet up the trunk, pulling with native

vigour an eight-foot saw (which was much too short for the purpose), and the slit was just beginning to enlarge. In a few minutes we should be able to test our conjectures with a yard measure. There was a loud crack; but the men went on sawing as if they were deaf. There was another, and with the agility of their race they jumped down, and had run some twenty yards, when the visible sway began.

Anon a sound appalling,  
As a hundred years of pride  
Crashed —

But the crash was more than the crash even of a douglas fir in a Vancouver forest, and never did a sequoia giant in Oregon resound more loudly. The upper trunk fell on a stump and split open with a scream. We walked along it with a surveyor's measure, and found the tallest of all our estimates of height exceeded. The tree was one hundred and thirty-five feet to the first bough, clean, without a suggestion of a waver or a roughness. The total height must have been two hundred feet. The chief woodman told me tales of the antiquity of these trees, suggesting that they numbered a thousand years, but confessed that he had no grounds whatever for his estimate. He was doubtless entirely wrong. I counted the rings on a similar giant, so far as that can be done, and found the number almost exactly two hundred. The trunk, sawn into twenty-ton lengths, was conveyed down the hill to the railway under a yoke supported on two enormous wheels, drawn by teams of oxen, fourteen in each. One block proved too much for a single team and a second was hitched on. The teamsman cracked his enormous whip, shouted to the labouring oxen as a team, and by name. If "Husky" or "Charlie" or "Ruddy" moved ever so little out of line he shifted back instantly on hearing his name. They were of every sort: a half-shorthorn, half-Devon, was in the lead, along with a cross-bred Hereford. There were Ayrshires and even half-bred Jerseys; but they knew their job and place. The selection of them and their placing in the line are as expert a bit of work as the making of a boat's crew; and the driving of them needs the talent of a long-trained coach. They dragged and steered the log between the trunks without a hitch, where hitches looked inevitable. As they began to disappear into the spaces of dappled light far down below us, their broad billowing backs looked almost like the surface of a forest stream.

The chief karri forest runs up to the area where "group-settlements" of immigrants were being installed under the scheme that had been arranged between Sir James Mitchell and Mr. Amery. The nature of



the trees that these men must clear off their future holdings is of vital importance to the prospector. The species of tree indicates the quality of the soil so accurately that in the extensive soil surveys undertaken by the West Australian Government, the chief pointer to the best land has been the presence of gum and karri. Just as in England the cowslip will grow wherever the oak flourishes, so here it is found that wheat and potatoes, and often, lucerne, may be cultivated wherever the red gum or karri (both belonging to the prevalent eucalyptus family) abound in conjunction.

Before I left England the Agent-General for Western Australia, who had a gift of imagination, had begged me to go to the north of the province, where I should find harbours big enough to hold a whole fleet, but so remote from habitations that the fleet might lurk there unseen. Hills and cliffs of iron-stone ran down into water deep enough for the biggest ship afloat. With such tales, true enough in general, he made one's mouth water, but time was running short. I could not even go far enough north to see what I still think the very best scheme of emigration ever set afoot, the Fairbridge Farm, which receives small boys, mostly of urban up-bringing, who are educated in the midst of the land of their adoption, and thus avoid the mistakes and disappointments that must punish older settlers in some measure. The first settlement was in Western Australia, and this remains the most typical, but others have been set up in Canada as well as other parts of Australia. With further support from the public and—why not?—from the Government this scheme might be fruitfully extended to any thinly populated part of the Empire.

I was seldom more reluctant to leave any place than Western Australia; and I quite fail to understand why this admirable region is inhabited—the capital apart—by a mere handful of people. There is room for millions. It is different from the rest of Australia in the character both of the land and the people. Doubtless the wide, barren, featureless Nullarbor Plain that cuts it off is in part the reason.

My time was up, if for no other reason, because the date for the opening of the fishing season in New Zealand was approaching. I had also other appointments, Victoria and New South Wales. The stations I was to visit in N.S.W. had no likeness to anything that I saw in Western Australia; but they had rival attractions. Set deep in the country, they are lonely but homely. The coloured leaves of the bougainvillæa decorate the comely wooden houses. About the homesteads stalk the great cranes that are called "native companions," and sometimes you might almost fancy you were in an English farmyard, till the resemblance is scattered by a flight of parrots, whose colours are eloquent of the tropics. From the deep

underground lake come bubbling up artesian springs, as naturally almost as if they were the source of an English river; but some of them are warm and some have a faint smell of sulphur. Quite steadily the artesian area is being enlarged and the great sheep paddocks extended. I asked one host how many acres his farm enclosed and he said he did not know. The area was roughly about twelve miles by twenty, he said. We drove out one day some thirty or forty miles over the dry plains to meet the bishop who was expected as a guest. He was much liked, but pitied as a tenderfoot, quite incapable of finding his way in this flat and featureless country. Such incapacity was more than the native-born could easily understand. It gives a marvellous sense of freedom to be able to drive straight across country in almost any direction without bothering about roads. You feel that you might so go on driving for thousands of miles (as you may) till you reached the edge of the world. It must be quite difficult for an Australian to believe that the world is round.

Whilst I was enjoying this open-air life among the emu and kangaroo and new birds, shooting a few duck up the river, and on one occasion a few pig, gone wild for a generation or so, a telegram reached me from a Sydney newspaper, asking me to write an obituary of Lord Northcliffe.

I felt too saddened by the news to respond to the request. Before setting out on the Empire tour I had spent a few days with Lord Northcliffe at Pau, travelling from Paris with Mr. Wickham Steed. He told me of the tales that were going round of Lord Northcliffe's health, both bodily and mental. We were delighted to find him altogether himself, merry and full of enjoyment. He had, of course, taken with him his fidus Achates, generally known as little Thompson, the Scottish golf professional who would have been of the championship class if he had been strong enough. His accuracy was astonishing and his method of coaching effective and original. More than this, he added gaiety to the game. The large group of his journalists whom Northcliffe had collected contained a number of ardent golfers and our host in spite of illness had lost none of his zest. We played innumerable foursomes; and the various businesses we had come to discuss took a very secondary place, at any rate in my regard. I left thinking all was well, that the rumours, like most rumours, were wrong. But those few happy weeks he spent at Pau were almost the last of the lucid intervals. Lord Northcliffe's health broke and he lost control of his mind. The most remarkable of his physical features was the immense head that is said to indicate either genius or madness. In his regard it seemed to mean both. The progress of his mental collapse did not become known to me till after my return to England. He made a sudden determination to travel incognito as Mr. Brown to Germany

and from there he sent back to *The Times* a series of articles, of which the chief burden was that every German woman was in the family way, as the first step to a new war. The first of these German articles was published. The editors had the good sense and courage not to publish the others. Returning to England, Northcliffe sent many wild telegrams to various people, including one famous journalist, who was told "You are fired"; and his appointments to directorships were as odd as his firing—but the unhappy tale is better left in obscurity. He had completely sane intervals, one just before his death, when he made a new and better will, but the older one prevailed. One of the very few people he cared to have near him towards the end was that quiet, wise man who through the war had directed the Red Cross organisation. He would have been glad to know that at a later date Lady Northcliffe was to become Lady Hudson.

As soon as the news reached me I knew not only that the Empire tour must come to an abrupt end and that I should have to cut out the Cape-to-Cairo project. I knew, too, that my job on the *Daily Mail* was done; and wondered what I should do next. It was, I suppose, a merely sentimental freak, but I made up my mind, whatever cables might reach me, to have the day's fishing in New Zealand, on which "the chief"—was this an example of madness?—had insisted. It meant several thousand more miles of travel, but it was done and I offered up six rainbow trout to the dead Chieftain's shade. He was a great fisherman and an ardent, like his younger brother Cecil, who later—when Lord Harmsworth—wrote a most charming little book on the art, in prose and verse. Perhaps this community of interest made the two brothers particularly congenial. Alfred was very fond of Cecil (as Cecil of Alfred) and enjoyed poking fun at him as much as poking fun at himself. "You will like Cecil," he said to me once. "He's quite a gentleman for a Harmsworth!" The kindly joke was aimed at his brother's unvarying suavity and charm of manner. On an earlier occasion a score, or so of admirers gave Northcliffe a dinner, and the spokesman suggested that it would be interesting if the guest would tell them what he considered to be the chief cause of his success. He agreed, and in his little after-dinner speech said that he attributed his success to his habit of discovering the best brains on any subject and using them. "For instance," he added, "my brother Cecil makes a very good speech and he has written my speech to-night!" He then proceeded to read out some elaborate periods that were an able parody of his brother's parliamentary style. Cecil regretted, in one of his fishing essays that Alfred deserted the river for the golf course; but both men were golfers. It was on the utterly charming Mid Herts golf course, of which

we both are members, that I last met Lord Harmsworth and was presented with a copy of the fishing book.

It had been one of my great desires to see Milford and the mountain scenery of the South Island of New Zealand, but even in Eden there are snakes and a shipping strike prevented me. I can say only that if the South Island is lovelier than the North, it must be paradise indeed. I reached it in November when the fishing season had just opened and the trout had not yet made their way from the little rivers to the large lakes; and they were multitudinous enough to heighten the depth of the water. They lay cheek by jowl in the glass-clear pools; and the sun set a flourish on their colours, for in the particular stream to which I was introduced all the trout were rainbow, though brown trout up to twelve pounds and occasionally much more abound in the lakes. The rainbow, unlike its cousin, shows bright colours on the back as well as the belly. Their numbers did not necessarily make them easy to catch. Perhaps a very expert dry-fisherman might have caught fish in the pools, but I totally failed either to lure them or frighten them and at last abandoned the pools for the shallows. There they took the fly that had been specially recommended without doubt or delay, and my belief is that its deadliness was due to its resemblance to a minnow or its New Zealand equivalent. It consisted chiefly of a long, grey-brown feather taken from some sort of heron; and so popular did the fly become that the species of heron was at one time in danger of total extinction until a special protective law was passed. When I had caught six fish weighing nearly thirty pounds I had had enough, not so much because the feeling began to pall as from a desire to watch the fish in the pools and the scenery of the river.

That tenth wonder of the world, the Pink Terraces—beautifully described by Froude in *Oceana*—had toppled in an earthquake, and their remains were colourless; but Rotorua (indeed most of the country in the neighbourhood) has no parallel perhaps the world over, though the paradise is lid to Hell. On the lakes your boat may be suddenly enveloped in steam. Geysers of hot water spout up promiscuously and make steaming rivulets. In these the Maoris—that happy, handsome race—sink baths and you see the merry face of some village beauty laughing over the rim. It had been a treat to look at the Fijians, tall, lithe and of a splendid upright carriage. The Maoris were heavier and stronger and not less handsome. The best physical development I have ever seen in any man was in a Maori who won a tree-cutting competition in a French wood in 1916. He swung an axe of immense weight as easily as W.G. swung his bat, and he was accurate to half an inch with directly horizontal strokes. A very stout beech was felled in a few minutes with a cut not

more than a foot in breadth. French woodmen looking on gaped with a mixture of admiration and disapproval. To their economic souls it was a wicked waste to cut a trunk so high above the ground. Fancy wasting two feet of wood!

The warmth of the water and its varying chemical properties has induced a novel social habit among dwellers in Rotorua. Society adjourns to warm, alkaline swimming baths just before bedtime; and it was my experience that thereafter it is quite difficult to stay awake long enough to undress.

What a bond is Empire and race! On every farm I visited in this island, which is as far from our island as the sphere of the world permits, the produce was designed for Britain, and in the co-operative factories the machinery was made in England, and its purchasers told me proud tales of the number of years it had lasted without repair. Surely it is a thing which ought to touch our imagination and—why not?—give us pride that these islands, New Zealand and Britain, separated by the maximum of distance, by immense wastes of sea, should nurse so close an affection, should cement so close an alliance in the ordinary commerce of life? Is it a ludicrous or a splendid example of this close friendliness between the two globe-sundered islands that a newspaper proprietor in one should send forth a representative with no other precise instruction than to catch rainbow trout in an antipodean brook? The association was formed when to cross those seas was an adventure indeed; but the shrinkage of the world, due to speed of travel and the instantaneous speed of speech, has clinched the friendship, one may hope in perpetuity. In the building of the Empire we have long been able to talk of the cement of the sea. This is now further strengthened by the bond of both air and æther.

The Directors of the Cunard Line by which I had crossed the Atlantic once spoke proudly of more than a dozen years of constant service without the loss of a single life: the sea was safer than the land. Some people tire of a long sea journey. It seems to me a perfect form of rest and recreation, even when you are anxious, very anxious, to reach home, as I then was. Doubtless all these journeys were made more pleasant by the kindness of the great ship-owners and the privileges I enjoyed, but they were after all unessentials.

Crossing the Pacific I had preferred Fiji to Honolulu, which for all its scenic splendour, was a little spoiled by scarlet cummerbunds round the evening bellies of rich holiday makers and by the mixture of immigrant races, including many Japanese and Chinese. Fiji has kept its native simplicity; and its villages, in spite of their tropical architecture, seemed to me more akin to an English village than any other social centre within

the Empire. When my returning ship reached Ceylon, where we stopped for two days, that most delectable island seemed to me to have much of the charm both of Honolulu and Fiji. It remains native and unspoiled, and the inland scenery has few parallels. It was an unexpected illustration of the shrinkage of the world that about half the passengers consisted of holiday makers from Australia. They go to Ceylon with as little thought as we may set off to the South of France. Bombay, Ceylon, Suez, Marseilles were our chief stopping places. At Marseilles we dropped some passengers who feared the Bay of Biscay, but took on others, including Mr. Lloyd George. He too had feared the Bay, and as he was to spend a holiday at Algeciras he had taken this route, forgetting, perhaps, that the Gulf of Lyons is often rather less kind to the sea traveller than the Bay. He was a merry companion, and emphasised his ardent patriotism by giving a prize in the Christmas Day celebrations for the man who could best play "God Save the King" on a penny whistle. His astuteness prevented the prize going to an American, who put the penny whistle to his lips but whistled the tune without its aid! I had much talk with him and rather unexpectedly found myself admiring his generosity of judgement. He had quarrelled with Lord Northcliffe at the time of the Versailles negotiations, and each had said bitter things of the other. Nevertheless he spoke of him with a good deal of perceptive admiration. Whatever people thought of Northcliffe, he argued, he did run his newspapers to express ideas in which he believed, while other proprietors thought only of profits. He was not acting on the maxim "*De mortuis nil nisi Bunkum*," but contrasting the dead man with certain of his successors who "only thought of half a crown." "You won't get them," he said "to take any interest in your emigration."

He saw things as they were, and were to be; though the changes in Fleet Street were to exceed his prognostic. Years before, after a meeting held to select a leader of the Conservative Party, I met Alfred Lyttelton, beaming with pleasure as he came fresh from the gathering. Austen Chamberlain had retired in favour of Bonar Law, and everyone had sunk personal prejudices. "It made me," he said, "think permanently better of human nature." Alfred Lyttelton himself was one of those rare people who made even his casual acquaintance "think better of human nature." He would have been saddened by the spirit prevalent in the Fleet Street to which I returned. It made me think permanently worse of human nature. The first verdict of the dead chief that I heard in Carmelite House was that "Northcliffe was never a journalist, only a showman;" and, "now we shall be able to have a decent paper." The chief energies of those in authority seemed to be bent on getting rid of anyone thought to be in

any way a friend of Northcliffe. Two at any rate of the best men in the office were at once "fired" with the minimum of courtesy. But perhaps all that tale, with the financial changes then set in motion, is best left in obscurity. The fun of journalism was a thing of the past.

About this date Chapman and Hall asked me to write a book about that past. I was a little reluctant but had a desire to set down my impression of the dead Chief. The book appeared under the title *A Traveller in News*. Just before its appearance I was asked to go back to Germany (on behalf of the *Daily Express*), and was to witness a succession of events that were as mad and bad as any political action of our time.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN



### Ruhr and Rhine



*On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,  
In spite of all their friends could say,  
They went to sea in a sieve.*

EDWARD LEAR

*I like your German singers well,  
But hate them too, and for this reason,  
Although they always sing in time,  
They also sing quite out of season.*

Epigram T. HOOD

AT the opening of the year 1923, the French and Belgians (in spite of British protests too politely expressed by Mr. Bonar Law) occupied the Ruhr, in order to enforce from Germany the proper payment of reparations, or such was the excuse for the illegal act. The British public was never induced to take much interest in the utterly fantastic and tragic game that was being played there, and I fancy that the ignorance still prevails. The strange, unlovely episode has best been described in a book by *The Times* correspondent, Mr. Gedye, who suddenly shifted from an official job to journalism, and found his intimate knowledge of German very useful. It was less useful nearly twenty years later, when the Nazis wanted to turn him out of Vienna! The title of his book, *The Revolver Republic*, gives the core of the situation. The French Government, inspired by the great armaments organisation, the Comité Des Forges, was determined to become "the ironmasters of Europe," to combine control of the coke of the Ruhr, which has special value in smelting, with the iron ore of Lorraine. I will not tell the tale again. It seemed to me scarcely credible at the time. A few headlines are enough.

The method chosen by the French was to set up an independent republic of the Rhine; and in the course of this wild and indeed wicked scheme, thousands of Germans were exiled and dumped over the boundary of the French sphere of occupation. Scallywags and gaolbirds were armed and paid, and the German police disarmed. Numbers of the leading industrialists of the Ruhr were given terms of imprisonment up



to fifteen years for no particular cause, and a number of lives lost by murder and small outbreaks. The Belgians trailed behind the French. Even before the Americans retired from their bridgehead at Coblenz, being disgusted at the whole business, the Rhineland High Commission, appointed to organise the occupation, had a French chairman with a casting vote, and this gave the French and Belgians a standing majority. Our representative, Lord Kilmarnock, was not a fighting man, and at length the voting within the Commission became such a farce that the chairman did not even wait for the British opinion, but in recording the vote interpolated perfunctorily "*abstention Britannique*." There had been a split between German labour and German capital. Ruhr workers had traditionally shown their hostility to the military machine. In addition the old hostility to Prussia and Prussianism had revived in new force; but it was certain as certain could be that the one effect of the intrigues set afoot by M. Poincaré, Senator Dariac, M. Tirard and the rest would be to force the Germans into a solid patriotic front. There was the added danger that the British, who were insulted at every turn by their allies, would become pro-German and anti-French. It was indeed quite impossible not to feel enraged against French methods. On one memorable occasion our soldiers chased the French back to the boundaries of their own bridgehead and then lined up to cheer a number of German lorries which were engaged in breaking a customs' barrier that Poincaré was endeavouring to establish, in flat contradiction of the treaty.

Nevertheless, in spite of the surrounding storm, Cologne and the British bridgehead were most pleasant holiday places. For the expenditure of one shilling you could attend the best German opera, whether comic or classical. The golf links and tennis courts were revived. The British police, reinforced later by women police, got on well with the populace. You could buy what you wanted for next to nothing and live at the best hotels for about five shillings a day. I was joined for some weeks in Cologne by my wife and two of my sons, and all three enjoyed the holiday altogether beyond expectation. Yet the life had a sense of nightmare, or at least not of waking reality. To drive out from the peaceful merriment of Cologne into Dusseldorf, Essen or indeed any part of the French and Belgian bridgehead, was to leave harbour for a tempestuous sea. Railway accidents, due partly to French ignorance, partly to German sabotage, were of daily occurrence; and photographs of them all were taken and circulated by the Germans. French soldiers, usually in singularly dirty uniforms, were everywhere on guard, hating their job and resenting the demeanour of hate that was obvious in most passers-by. From time to time you ran from comedy into stark tragedy, from comic opera

revolution into sheer murder. Assassins found their way even into Cologne.

An example of each has a certain salience in my memory of those days. The first of the tragedies befell at the Krupp works in Essen. A French subaltern sent with a platoon of soldiers to requisition motor cars arrived as factory workers were emerging. He seems to have feared he was being attacked, ordered his men to fire, and twelve of the workers were killed. The Germans, with both cunning and skill, made of the funeral of these unhappy men a spectacular display of the highest emotional value. The bodies were carried in immense oak coffins to the crown of a hill overlooking the works and were followed by an assembly of at least twenty thousand factory hands. At the summit three pulpits had been built, for the victims represented three sorts of religion, so to say. Six of the victims had been Protestants, four Roman Catholics and two Communists, and the Communists had insisted that their anti-religious creed was itself a religion. The Protestant and Roman Catholic priests spoke quietly and reverently, both with the least possible use of religious phraseology. The third to speak was the Communist, and behind his head as he faced the half circle of listeners was silhouetted the hammer and sickle. He spoke of the men's Golgotha, and seemed to go out of his way to use religious phraseology, while he enraged, or at least horrified, many of the listeners by his loud rhetorical denial of an after-life. The scene was unforgettable. The crowd visibly shivered under the Communist's oratory; but nothing could break the perfect discipline of the ceremony. Except for a single aeroplane that roared overhead at the opening, the French wisely remained out of sight; and these well-drilled thousands dispersed as they had assembled, in unbroken order and almost unbroken silence. As an example of German organised discipline and use of emotional propaganda the funeral was a supreme, even a superb, triumph.

Yet there were flaws in the propaganda. I telegraphed a full description of the scene, and being not a little moved, thought that readers might be moved; but not a word was to appear. The wire, as happened nine times out of ten, was held up for forty-eight hours or thereabouts; and perhaps it was this difficulty in sending immediate news that prevented the British people realising in the least what was happening in the Ruhr. Even to-day it seems to be an obscure backwater of history. It finds, for example, no reference whatever in Arthur Bryant's *English Saga*, though our international relations were profoundly affected. The hatred of the Germans for the French reached a height never touched, even in their terrible wars; and our friendship with the French was irrecoverably

wounded, at least among those who were present at this crisis. I said one day to a French senator whom I met in Dusseldorf: "But really, we cannot stand these snubs indefinitely." He answered, doubtless half in jest, but with the insolence that had fallen like a disease on one group of Frenchmen, "If you object we shall flatten out London with our airplanes!" A French observer, much out of sympathy with Poincaré and his creed, pointed to some French troops and ejaculated in my hearing: "*Voilà les Prussiens d'aujourd'hui.*"

A cynical determination to use their power was quite unconcealed. An accident to my car, as I was starting to hear the trial of the Ruhr magnates, provided me with one example. I went to the French propaganda office, run by a legal representative of the Comité des Forges, to ask whether I could get a place in one of their cars. He said at once, "Oh, you needn't go all that way. I can give you a list of the verdicts and sentences!" This was before the trial had begun! France suffered at that period from an excess of bellicose or Chauvinistic pride, backed, perhaps, by fear, as she was to suffer twenty years later from traitorous pacifism. At both times, it is probable, the guilt lay with a small group of leaders.

Such tragedies as this at the Krupp works did not in any degree interfere with the purpose of the plot for an independent republic on the Rhine. I met several of the local leaders, of whom only one, a French-Pole, who called himself Parsifal, had any romantic quality. The most despicable was an American-German, Herr Nettar, who set up a republican headquarters at Bonn, where I interviewed him. The position was utterly ludicrous. The republican green and yellow flag waved on the building. At the door stood a few very grubby French poilus with their quarters on the ground floor. On the top floor the German mayor and his staff carried on their civic duties undisturbed. In a room on the middle floor sat Herr Nettar and his stout female secretary. He was obviously bored and delighted to talk with anyone, for he was a braggart born. He told me marvellous tales of the courage of his men, of whom each was too good for a dozen slavish Prussians. He spoke of them as in thousands; but his army must have had great gifts of camouflage for I never discovered one. About a week later Herr Nettar softly and silently vanished away without fluttering any of the doves of that quiet town.

There were even more absurd headquarters than this. In the little town of Düren, the revolutionaries established themselves in the same building as the representatives of the Rhineland High Commission. Their leader, who was an unemployed German from Trier (at one time occupied by the Americans), was in receipt of French money and paid some

of his men in francs. He had a certain success, and accumulated a dangerous body of scallywags. Murders were frequent. Mr. Gedye was himself present at one shooting affray in an inn and was lucky to escape. Happily the Belgians grew disgusted; M. Poincaré fell and comparative peace was restored.

Before the British left Cologne, to the great regret of many of them, the Revolver Republic, as the Germans called it, had failed and the policy was definitely surrendered. It had achieved just one permanent result: it had united a Germany, torn by conflicting parties, by labour and capital, by Communists and militarists, by Rhine dwellers and Prussians. The tens of thousands of exiles returned with an undying hatred of the French that helped them to smooth out their internal differences.

Most of the retiring British took with them as mementos astronomic amounts of German money. With ruthless cunning the Germans had decided to smash their own coinage and so wipe out the internal debt. The mark fell several hundred per cent daily till at last only million or even billion mark notes were of service. A taxi-driver had to get off his box and bring out pencil and paper and spend perhaps five minutes in calculation before he could tell you your fare. It took as long for the post office authorities, who were better mathematicians, to calculate the price of a message. In the best hotels you had to pay for each meal as you ate it, for the mark might fall to half its value at any moment. We calculated at one time that it was cheaper to light your cigarette with a million mark note than to strike a match, that is to say a million marks were of less value than the fiftieth part of a penny. I met one day a member of Lloyds Bank who told me they had just ruled out six noughts from all accounts. Their books were not ruled for such fantastic figures; and a number of foolish persons in England, seeing the chance of being millionaires, had sent out five pound notes, or such small sums, for investment in marks. They very soon became multi-millionaires—in marks! Shops hated to sell goods, though they could not refuse, and the canny farmers insisted on a return to primitive methods of barter. In Bad-Ems we saw a cart that had brought in a load of potatoes (ordered by the municipality for feeding the poor) return to the farm with a piano on board.

Cologne had been a charming place in spite of such nightmare events. How many happy memories of it and the people I met there remain? My bedroom looked on the tall, graceful spire of the cathedral, round which hawks continually circled, without much disturbing the pigeons. Some else useless American-built cutters plied on the Rhine under the white ensign, and the hospitality of the navy was never more thoroughly

enjoyed. The dismantled fortifications east of the city had become a natural bird sanctuary, where you could always watch that golden bird, with the liquid note, the golden oriole. I found a most charming golf opponent in King Stephens, agent for the Southern Railways, whom I had known as a schoolboy at Bradfield and came to admire the wisdom and courage of a contemporary of his, at the same school, Mr. Thurston, who was our consul. We were well served in Cologne. General Godly was wise and dignified. Julian Piggott, representing the Rhineland High Commission, discovered a certain diplomatic genius. It was his father, doubtless inspired by the son, who wrote a much discussed pamphlet arguing, indeed proving, that the French occupation of the Ruhr was an act of illegality. Major Ball, wounded a great number of times during the war, represented the Disarmament Commission and with his native courage earned the good feeling of some of the best of the Germans by the unusual method of telling them home truths. He was to do great things in business on his return to England; but faith in his own philosophy of patriotism was to remain his master passion. What numbers of visitors I met in Cologne, including those two strange friends, Barrie and General Freyburg. Henry Nevinson and Evelyn Sharp, who was to become his wife, were old acquaintances. Ben Tillett, whom I already regarded as one of the best talkers I ever met, performed the marvellous feat of settling a German strike which had broken out in Cologne at the time of his arrival. One of the people I did not meet was a connection of mine, who bore the name of Baumgartner. His father, who was of Swiss descent, was an English admiral, but the name sounded German and proved so awkward a companion that he had temporarily changed it, to his Christian name of Percy; and I did not discover him.

One tragedy befell. Among the journalists who flocked to Cologne was Adam, *The Times* representative in Paris, a man of the widest knowledge and many high accomplishments. He was the translator of the books embodying the Versailles Treaty, and very well he did it. We all sat at his feet; and he was a brilliant talker. His term in the Ruhr was brought to a sudden end by a motor accident; and he never fully recovered from the head wound that he received, though he was to live for several years and do much good work. His wife, too, was a journalist, known to a very wide world as "Madge, of *Truth*."

The cavalcade is long; and most memories very pleasant. Nevertheless it was a great relief, almost like the relief of the armistice, to leave it all and return to England, yet more desirable than ever by contrast with "less happier lands." As for myself, I began to see a chance of enjoying that blessed country as never before since home days.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



### The Open Air



*'Tis pleasant through the loopholes of retreat,  
To peep at such a world; to see the stir  
Of Babel, and not feel the crowd.*

W. COWPER

*And not without honour my days ran,  
Nor yet without a boast shall end,  
For I was Shakespeare's countryman,  
And were not you my friend?*

WILLIAM WATSON

ONE of the great advantages shared by those who make their livelihood by writing is that they need never retire altogether. They never reach that crisis when life is cut in two by the succession of unbroken leisure to continuous hard work. They are under no necessity to learn a new sort of life just when their energy for such changes is beginning to ebb. Even if their powers for one sort of writing begin to fail, they can fall back on others, as E. F. Benson confessed in his lively essay in autobiography. He could no longer write good novels, so he took to biography. For me the days of daily journalism, a very exacting but very stimulating profession, were over. What lesser activity should take its place?

Writing is a very pleasant occupation—such is my experience—chiefly because it thrashes out the harvest of the senses. Keats' chief regret was that he might not have time to glean his "teeming brain," but even he wrote best and with most joy when he was telling what he saw and heard and smelt; and for little people, perhaps most of all for descriptive journalists, the eyes are the motive power that drives the wheels of words. I doubt whether any pastime gives more pleasurable satisfaction than expressing in written words the scene that greeted your eyes on the top of some golden hour; and every season in England is lavish of golden hours.

A little while before his sudden death, Lawrence of Arabia, whom I knew but slightly, said, "Now I can devote myself to seeing and enjoying England." The incomparable drama of his life and his book-making faded into insignificance before such a prospect, or so he felt at that moment.

Others of course feel differently. Action, not observation, is in their blood. For example, I lunched with General Freyberg in Cologne, just after the last war, and he spoke chiefly of his feeling of flatness now the fighting was over. His one idea at the time was to seek new battles, and he had hopes that he might find them in Russia. He was with his great friend, Barrie, one of the least warlike men that ever lived. Barrie exulted in the pen. He was for a long time president of the Authors' Club (to which I belong), and the motto of the club is *Cedit Ensis Calamo*. He even presented the club with an ink-pot and a silver pen. This was ingeniously contrived so that a gong was rung when the pen was dipped into the bowl; and it was so used by chairmen to warn speakers who were too long in the wind. In spite of the partial truth of this motto, Barrie, the pen-lover, was a complete captive to Freyberg, the sword-wielder; but perhaps in their friendship the two implements were complementary.

Lawrence could wield both with gusto; but with him the pen won in the sequel, and if he had lived, he might have written a great book on England. His very last holiday was a tour of Western England, in company part of the time with Henry Williamson, who was writing a sort of western guide book. Lawrence nursed a passion for England, as such. He confessed to the "master bias" of Wordsworth's Happy Warrior.

How English scenes and, as it seems to me, English country houses, capture the imagination of the most unlikely persons! Lawrence used to visit at intervals one of my nearest neighbours in the country, Mr. Cherry Garrard, author of that real classic, *The Worst Journey in the World*, whose family had been associated for many hundred years with Lamer, their Hertfordshire property. Maybe it was in part this house, with its in- and out-of-doors possessions, that inspired H. G. Wells, another visitor there, to his paean on the English country house. Alongside it has lived for many years that yet more surprising captive to the scene, Bernard Shaw. Two examples of his interest in country affairs astonished me. I was walking one evening in a covered lane when I saw in the twilight a tall figure oddly helmeted and clad in a long white coat, wielding a hedge-chopper with efficiency and energy. He was Bernard Shaw, engaged in making the lane more easily passable for pedestrians. He was already well past his eightieth year, but his strength was unabated. After some pleasant talk on country things I went on my way, feeling that he was longing to get back to his job.

On another walk close to the same spot my wife came upon a swarm of bees, hung on the boughs of a lime, and made enquiry. She was told that the only bee-keeper was Bernard Shaw; and when the news of the

errant bees was taken to the ex-Rectory, where he lives, emissaries were sent out to take the swarm.

What a kindly and pleasant country neighbour he was felt to be! His rural humour is as keen as his urban. We took him the news that a barking deer or muntjak had been seen astray in the neighbouring park, and the way he showed his interest was by asking, if we could not find it a munt jill!

When I heard of Lawrence's new desire to know England, I felt that he had said something for me. Daily journalism had been more than ever exacting throughout the years of the war; and happily its grim sequel in the Ruhr was a thing of the past. I could look forward—so far as one can look forward at fifty odd—to a more intimate companionship with the country, with England, though the problem (which exists even for a journalist) how to do enough work in a country home had still to be solved. The solution was made comparatively easy by my oldest and most highly prized association with journalism. J. L. Garvin was editor of the *Observer* and his eldest daughter, who, along with her own poetic gifts, inherits many of his qualities, worked with him. Life at Beaconsfield, not far from the lovely Penn country, had if possible enhanced his zest in country things, and he asked me, as always in my times of partial leisure, to interpret them week by week in the *Observer*, as years ago in the *Outlook*. To this was added a request from Sir Evelyn Wrench to do much the same thing in the *Spectator*, a paper that my father had treasured from the days of the American Civil War. Now writing, as I have said, is a very pleasant amusement, if you are reaping the harvest of your eyes; and, though delight in the country is pure and unadulterated, nursed for its own sake, a daily and unceasing presence, I must confess that the duty of putting it all into words adds a certain conscious gusto. The felt pleasure becomes more palpable, but not less instinctive. More than this: *littera scripta manet*. What you have written remains more vivid in the memory. No one, I think, has carried this idea out so fruitfully as my old acquaintance, Robertson Scott. In early days he worked in London. Lord Northcliffe once said, in reference, I think, to his work on the *Westminster Gazette*, that he was the only perfect sub-editor he had known. Reasons of health drove him into the country, and he became a great country journalist, evincing that same sub-editorial gift which had struck Northcliffe. He put into books and newspapers the essential gist of any subject he studied, including, for example, goats and sugar beet! After a long and varied period, part of it spent as a sort of propagandist in Japan, he bought an old and large manor house at Idbury, in Oxfordshire, and feeling that such a great building must be adequately



employed, started that most successful quarterly, the *Countryman*. Its success was beyond all general expectation, thanks in part to the founder's sub-editorial skill, but more to the growing dimensions and zeal of a public ardently in love with country things. The dominance of the town seems continually to increase, in the English people a nostalgia for the country from which they have been exiled. The townsman desires to hear about the country, often more ardently than the countryman. I have thought that the very best verb in our literature—half way between a pun and perfect onomatopoeia—is found in Thomas Hood's *Song of the Shirt*, and it puts emphasis on a deep truth. The sweated seamstress felt that the swallows came to "twit" her with the spring. How often have I received moving letters from urban invalids, telling of the refreshment they find in reading about the birds, flowers, butterflies and the rest, which they seldom or never can see! The urban mind, that chief curse of civilisation, may be found in the country, but it happens often that the rural mind is enhanced by a reaction against urban surroundings.

On behalf of the *Countryman*, Robertson Scott asked me and a number of others to set down the reasons why we preferred to live in the country. I told him that the task was impossible, for you cannot go behind an axiom or argue about the reasonableness of an instinct. But it is difficult for a journalist to disobey any editor; my answer could only be that the meaning of life was there, that without country sights and sounds—and country people and their work—pleasure might be possible, but not happiness. The best answer, of course, would have been to quote half a dozen poems of Wordsworth's.

The *Observer*, to my eyes, had always a more pleasing countenance than other papers, and this beauty was not only skin deep: a corporate spirit prevailed to a degree that is perhaps rarely known. The team was a team of good companions, who enjoyed juxtaposition in the columns of the paper with the others however different the themes. It was like losing a member of one's own household, when death robbed the ranks of such men as Humbert Wolff and Gould in the heyday of their powers.

The history of the *Observer* makes a pleasing chapter in the annals of the better London journalism. It is an old paper. On its centenary in 1926, Thomas Hardy wrote this most characteristic verse, headed, "The Newspaper Soliloquizes":

Yes, yes, I am old. In me appears  
The history of a hundred years;  
Empires', kings', captives' births and deaths;  
Strange faiths and fleeting shibboleths;

Tragedy, comedy throngs my page  
Beyond all mummied on any stage:  
Cold hearts beat hot, hot hearts beat cold,  
And I beat on—yes; yes; I am old.

Odd though it may seem for the founder of a paper utterly new in fact as in idea, Lord Northcliffe had a peculiar fondness for the *Observer*. In humorous mood he would contrast the *Daily Mail* and *Times*, calling one "The Dog Fight" and the other "The Mausoleum," but he never jibed at the *Observer* and was much upset by its want of commercial success. Several people, including one American recruit to the *Daily Mail*, had tried to enliven it, but had succeeded only in doing it harm.

At last Lord Northcliffe called in J. L. Garvin for consultation. The account of the first interview that prevailed in Fleet Street was that after Lord Northcliffe had recounted a number of vain attempts to please the public, Garvin said, "I should give the public what it did not want." That meant, of course, something better than it wanted, or the theory proclaimed by Wordsworth that a poet must create his own public and teach it what was good. Whatever was said, Garvin became editor in 1908 with a share in the paper and carried out his theory, acquired perhaps during his editorship of the *Outlook*. On one side he would deal with views—with literature, art, nature and even domestic amusements—on the other he would give news and his own interpretation of news. The recipe was an outstanding success, thanks chiefly no doubt to the editor's own brilliance in his weekly survey (never more widely effective than during the Great War). He lost his only son, a young man of brilliant achievement; but nevertheless heartened all English-speaking people by a certain gift of courageous vision. At the same time the pleasing appearance and high standard of the other side of the paper secured a permanent friendship with a very wide circle. His eldest daughter, after taking her degree in English Literature at Oxford, was set in charge over the literary editorship in 1926; and never was reviewing of a higher standard maintained week by week and year by year. Garvin's editorship lasted for thirty-four years, the latter part under the ownership of Lord Astor, whose brother, J. J. Astor, had become owner of *The Times*. The longest association with the paper, longer even than Garvin's, was that of Robert Bell, the father of that most intrinsic countryman, Adrian Bell. He, too, in his own field, contributed gifts that had in them a touch of genius. What quiet humour his paragraphs embalmed! And in the long years when he was editor and assistant editor, he made no small contribution to this corporate spirit. He too retired to the country, continuing to write; and there his

son wrote novels—and an anthology—that have in them, whatever their qualities as fiction, more of the true life of the farm than any in the language, always excepting *Farmers' Glory*. In that Mr. Street, from his Wiltshire farm, immortalised for us a picture of a mid-England farm that still retained the qualities of the Middle Ages. If anyone wishes for a telling contrast between Victorian and Georgian days, he should read *Farmers' Glory* and then visit the neighbouring farm where Mr. Hosier, that inventive and thoughtful genius, sweeps up his crops with high-powered cars, groups his milch cows in portable bails, and fertilises the chalk downs with his ingeniously progressive hen-houses. Mechanisation is an ugly word and often an ugly thing; but not seldom romance brings up the nine fifteen. The man and boy who run each of Mr. Hosier's bails approach the ideal labourer's life. They are proud of the record, each of his unit. They are well paid, and it is not an unessential addition that they go to and from work at their ease in motor cars.

In the first years of my new life I frequently left my country home to attend agricultural shows in this and that English county, and often used the occasion to see and enjoy the neighbourhood. No one, as far as I know, has ever done literary justice to those quaintly English ceremonies. I have attended agricultural shows in the Americas, in Australia, France, Belgium, and Denmark; but England, notorious the world over for her neglect of husbandry, so excels them all (as also in flower shows) that there is no comparison. To "The Royal," known as such in the proud brevity of its title the world over, assemble farmers from most parts of the globe, especially from South America; but even the Royal is in its degree almost parochial. It failed altogether when some ardent reformers tried to give it a central site within range of London. London, of course, would have nothing to do with it. Those immense, heavy, costly pavilions of oak, taking the better part of a year to erect and set in order, those thousands of pounds of capitalisation, spent regardless of cost or even small details (such as interleaved catalogues almost too heavy to carry about) proved a vain ground bait. The acres of marquee, housing a flower show more magnificent than, say, the quinquennial international flower show in Holland, could not lure Londoners to an exhibition belittled by the attribute agricultural. Even in its peripatetic career the Royal has had violent ups and downs, gains and losses; and incomparable though it always is and has been as a farmers' show, and indeed as a public festival, it is the county show that is most profoundly English, whether in Cornwall or Yorkshire or Suffolk, which are among the most characteristic. Almost every county has created its own special breed and made it famous about the world. The Yorkshire large white pig founded

the prosperity of the Danish trade in bacon. The Philippine post office selected a Romney Marsh sheep for the adornment of its postage stamp. Hereford and Durham cattle are the fathers of the South American herds. We cast our meat upon the waters and it comes back to us chilled.

It is a singular illustration of the infinite variety of the English counties that almost all these breeds of cattle, sheep, pigs and less markedly of ponies and horses have qualities that fit them for special conditions of soil and climate. It is not the colour of his white face that gives the Hereford its distinction but its capacity to grow fat on particular types of herbage. The world keeps coming back to us for the regeneration of its stock; and is compelled to. Yet financially this essential contribution to the world's husbandry is of little service to us. Though now and again some fantastic price is paid for a ram or bull by an overseas buyer the grand total in a year is a bagatelle, not a hundredth part of the money we spend on imported food. Doubtless the world ought to endow us as a breeding centre, but whatever the future of internationalism, it is hardly likely to advance to that pitch!

If a foreign visitor wished to attend a scene entirely, hopelessly British, he could do worse than visit the annual Hertfordshire show in Hatfield Park. There is Hatfield House itself, where Queen Elizabeth heard the news of her accession. She might be hailed as the first woman M.F.H., for she was a great huntress in her salad days. Parts of the house were old in her times; and her famous oak, alongside the agricultural show ground is not one of the oldest. The visitor might perhaps take it as a symbol that successive Cecils, who have maintained an unbroken reputation in statesmanship from Elizabethan days, have propped up the limbs of some of their antique oaks to protect them against their "necessity in being old."

One of the events of the Show is the competition of shepherds, where dogs and sheep appear and disappear among the ferny glades of the oak woods of the gigantic park. Elizabeth, it may be, would have enjoyed yet more the sound of the horn and the entry of horse and hounds through the avenues into the ring. Our theorists who look to large-scale mechanised farming and the end of parochial craftsmanship may yet see within the show beautiful examples of the work of local blacksmiths; and one at least of the best competitors boasts an heredity and local continuity that may compare with the Cecils'. Yet even in the oak-encircled park-field, almost at the doors of London, the farm stock, by reason of a certain obvious aristocracy in their guise, remain the cynosure, even in the least expert eyes. As he left the ground this visitor from abroad might

stop for a moment to watch a local cricket match, played with the old gusto, between the great avenue and the ancestral country house.

In a famous passage of Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* a young priest, holding a printed book in one hand and pointing to the Cathedral with the other, says, "*Ceci à tué cela.*" Men were putting energy into the printed word, into books and no longer struggling to express their souls in architecture. The criticism occurs to me whenever I travel—as very often—the short interval between Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City. The critics united in prophesying that the country house, as it flourished up to 1914 and in diminished glory up to 1939, is dead as the dodo. Garden cities, nationalised land, individual poverty, a communal society will utterly destroy these relics of feudalism; and the golden age will approach. The critics prognosticate with equal assurance and satisfaction that the craftsman, the local artist in metal, leather, wood, straw or whatnot, is as dead as the feudal lord, that the blacksmith who wrought those beautiful iron gates in the craftsmen's exhibit at the Hatfield show will have as few successors as the Cecils in the activities in which each family has made fame. It may be so. A grimly symbolic thing happened concerning certain iron gates, exhibited at Hatfield just before the war. They were made as a present to the Lord-Lieutenant with a particular view to their site. Almost on the day of the gift the country house was surrendered and presently became the property of a trust. The prophets of the new age have of course many facts apt for the foundation of their views. Not so far from Hatfield two great country houses belong to scientific farming institutions. One is a boys' preparatory school, one is regarded as ripe for enclosure in a garden city, one has been sold to a Trust, which has let it to a company, and one of the greatest country mansions in Hereford has been converted into an asylum. Such development, or retrogressions, are numerous and undoubted in every English county.

Nevertheless not all Jeremiahs see their prophecies fulfilled. There are many signs of the revival of craftsmanship. The prevalence of cheap factory work has produced a certain reaction in favour of the real artist, such as the blacksmith I know best. He refused to exhibit in one show solely because a prize had been given to a man who had used a file on wrought iron work. The crime was horrible in his eyes. No artist could have been angrier if he had found a rival showing a painted photograph. Such artistic feeling is still strong both in village artificers and their patrons. It may be that craftsmen are being reborn, like the artists in the Norfolk thatch, which has been used for the new buildings of a great Norfolk school and for a new colony of statutory smallholders. If the

blacksmith's forge survives, so may the best of the country houses, which also have been great homes of art, as their home farms have been and are sources of the best husbandry in the world. The country home that reached its summit in the eighteenth century, or indeed in the sixteenth, is of course extinct, and in spite of the debt we owe to it, its passing was inevitable and therefore welcome; but it may yet have a successor with parallel virtues and the unit survive to maintain the variety and social zest of the village. Even Hatfield, the supreme type, is not yet dead, or visibly moribund. "The road to yesterday" may be the same road that leads to tomorrow.

Living in the country between the two wars, and making the country my profession as well as my pleasure, I could not but make any new movement towards its new order my concern; the birth and career of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, the accumulating influence of the National Trust, which is likely to be the greatest of all landlords, the organisation of garden cities, the new art of regional planning and zoning, the dedication of historic possessions, the plans for land nationalisation, not by politicians of the left, as in the days of Henry George (and the early Lloyd George), but by agricultural specialists, such as Sir Daniel Hall or C. S. Orwin, the arrival of the harvester-thresher, and consequent destruction of hedgerows, the mania for ribbon development and the spread of the plague that Dean Inge labelled bungalow growth, and not least among beneficent changes the creation of Women's Institutes with their invaluable contribution to the social pleasures of the English village.

My home happened to be close to that pleasant stretch of country, where the Welwyn Garden City was built. I saw at the time of its birth that charming, one-idea-ed man Ebenezer Howard, from whose faith it sprang. For the first time in that neighbourhood one of the great land-owners had decided to sell a part of his wide acres. Almost on the spur of the moment, without knowing quite where the money was coming from, the land was purchased at a moderate rate by the small group of enthusiasts whom Ebenezer Howard had inspired. The faith was more than justified. They found on the site scarcely suspected sources of wealth: brick clay, singularly clean gravel beds, excellent water. The Society of Friends, much concerned in the enterprise, saw a prospect of fruitful agriculture. One of the organisers, who has the gift of ready speech, gave me one day on the still virgin site a glowing picture of a perfect town of some thirty-five thousand inhabitants, who lived in a rate-free community, so promising in his eyes were the prospects of the local mines, and the retail monopoly that was meditated. The agricultural belt was

to provide food, unstaled, unsullied and undelayed by passage from one merchant to another. The workmen who were to build the houses and roads and the rest would find permanent employment as soon as this work was done, in the factories that would be transferred from crowded centres. "Great is juxtaposition," and as soon as their day's work was over, they would walk along lanes to their cottages set in bright gardens and surrounded by a true country scene. The adjacent wood and its surroundings would be both park and sanctuary.

Such a dream was unfolded to me, and year by year I watched the progressive strife to bring it into being. What did I see: Houses, some run up at excessive speed, encroaching on the agricultural belt as first designed. Protests arose against the shop monopoly, and a rival establishment was set up on the boundary, numbers of men and some women, ascending and descending from the trains on their daily passage to London, indicated that the garden city, the satellite town, had not escaped the danger of becoming in some measure a dormitory for workers in the Wen. The factories held aloof, and of the few that came some desired women's work rather than men's. I heard of financial difficulties and no one spoke of the abolition of rates. Dwellers in the neighbourhood told unsympathetic stories of the inhabitants and the absurdities of "the garden city mind."

Something like failure looked probable to many outside observers, and there was a period of depression among the most ardent and sympathetic. The city increased nevertheless, if slowly and laboriously; and as the trees in the avenues grew larger and the gardens were enriched, it became a very pleasant place to see—garden-like rather than city-like. Both inward faith and outward appreciation increased, and at last, though many prophecies remained unfulfilled, a real, even a great, success came into sight. From now on none of those who are concerned with the planning of a new England in the piping times of peace can disregard the fulfilment of old Ebenezer Howard's vision.

A foolish parallel has often occurred to me. On the other side of my country home Chalmers Mitchell bought on behalf of the London Zoo several hundreds of acres of oak and pine wood and field, crowning the Chiltern chalk. Neighbours had known it well as an excellent pheasant shoot. In spite of many difficulties (not the least the closing of rights of way) the Whipsnade Zoo came into being. Among the first animals to be encaged was a wombat, which tunneled its way out and after a few glorious months of wild life was killed by the local fox hounds. Successive visits to this site could not but suggest comparison with the garden city. Welwyn and Whipsnade joined hands. The Zoo grew delightfully in

appearance and in public estimate. The bluebells under the oaks did not disappear, and Chalmers Mitchell himself found that wild flowers, especially foxgloves, multiplied where previously frequent pickings had prevented them seeding. The bright eyes of the wolves, looking out from the gloom of the tall firs, had the appearance of native fauna. Occasionally a fox would climb the twelve-foot wire and steal a valuable bird; but birds that had not bred before in captivity hatched healthy broods. It was a queer experience, after Australia, to watch the cock brush-turkey scratching up an immense heap of oak leaves and bluebell stalks and bents, and an unexpected pleasure at a later month to see the young family which had been brought to birth by the heat of fermenting oak leaves as in the Antipodes by evergreen leaves of the gums and tall grasses. Tigers stretched their limbs in graceful freedom within the chalk walls of their sunny prison; and the wallabies could cheerfully "thole the winter" in the electric warmth of their snug caves. Zebra and ostrich had room to show their paces. Alongside this a small sanctuary not open to the public attracted even the crossbill. Whipsnade was a triumphant success. Would Welwyn follow suit?

Among those practically interested in the making of Whipsnade was the owner and founder of the greatest of open air zoos, the late Duke of Bedford, a Bedfordshire neighbour. The glory of Woburn Park came to an end with the late Duke, perhaps with the disappearance on her private aeroplane of the late Duchess, who was an ardent naturalist. How scornful she was, when I once professed a belief in a March cuckoo! A first visit to Woburn was in its heyday a startling experience. As I took the bend of a curving road by the Abbey, yak, ostrich, and I cannot remember what other strange creatures, trotted across in front of the car in a cavalcade of ludicrous proportions. Below them a circular pond seemed to be completely encircled by successive rings of wild fowl in infinite variety, and beyond that a great herd of wapiti galloped towards a fence that did not look strong enough to stop one of them.

Some of the Woburn animals overflowed the boundaries. I was more than once invited to a day's shooting just outside the Park. At the beginning of the first drive a noise, singularly like a badly-played piccolo, sounded in front and a bird, yards in length and of bright plumage, flew past me at head height and a yard or two away. A cry of "Shoot, shoot!" from my neighbour reached me too late. The bird was an Amherst pheasant, and the species, it seems, is so quarrelsome that other pheasants do not like its neighbourhood. Nerves, a little shaken by the experience, were soon further shattered. The brushwood in front was parted and across the drive close by ambled a beast that had almost a pig-like ap-



pearance, though it had the feet of an antelope. Again the imperative cry of "Shoot" reached me too late. The animal was a barking deer or muntjak and it had an evil reputation among the adjacent smallholders, who grew vegetable crops for the Luton market. Others were shot during the day; and I must confess that the venison was the best I have tasted.

It is perhaps a pointer to the nature of the coming age that Whipsnade has taken the place of Woburn. No more will the owner of such a country house be sufficiently well endowed to populate two thousand acres of park with priceless animals collected from all corners of the world. At least so the prophets hold: such glory is departed for good and all, if it is for good.

What will succeed? For myself, even Wordsworth's view that as he lived under the more habitual sway of the English scene a certain glory and zest departed, to be replaced by a more philosophic sense of natural beauty—even this amount of loss cannot be truthfully confessed. I took the habit, as the stress of compulsory labour decreased, of spending a holiday every year in some foreign country or other—among the sophisticated and alien trees of the South of France, among the perpetual rainbows and stoned roads of Madeira, among the kites, hoopoes and asphodels of Majorca, among the hills and bananas and immortelles of Jamaica and the West Indian Islands, among the golden eagles and trout of Jura, among the cyclamens and Bible lilies (or more correctly the coronaria anemones) of Palestine, among the vleis of South Africa, populous with ibis, kingfishers and a hundred wading birds, among the zinnias and milkweed butterflies and locusts of the Argentine, among the crocodiles, rubber trees and innumerable moths of the Amazon—and every time on coming home the glory of England was enhanced. It happened, too, that a threat of failure of sight (such as grievously afflicted that great observer, that great Englishman, Sir Edward Grey) was removed by an oculist's skill, and a new brightness invested the scene: the colours of the world were reborn. So it came about that England as such grew more precious as time went on, even more vivid. The immense Amazon was no rival to the petty Mimram or Mount Carmel to a Chiltern Down, nor Cape Town, with the glorious rock over which the clouds fall like a cataract, at all the equal of a Ewelme with its Elizabethan almshouses and watercress streams and central church. The brooks, the hedgerows, the spinneys, the homesteads, the villages and the scattered trees (that made General Botha feel as if he was continually approaching a forest)—all these to my eyes consented to a natural relation, to an intrinsic comradeship, that is found by the partial Englishman nowhere else in the world; and it all stood as a symbol of the social friendliness of the English village, whether in the flats of Huntingdon, on the harsher

table land of the Cotswold, in the rich fields of the Garden of England or among Devon walls and combs.

Is this peculiar charm to be planned away by zealots for mechanised farming, the urbanisation of the village and the decentralisation of factories? Experience of the sequels of the first great war, experience of the devastating changes of mind and material made imminent by the second and greater war, have not weakened my faith that the England which was will in essence remain. The hedgerows, in which our beneficent birds build and under which the best stock in the world shelter, will hold their own. The village, however fully its interests enlarge, will keep much of its unity, the nostalgia for the country, bred by urban life, will increasingly help to preserve peculiar scenes, as sanctuaries, as national parks, as sacred valleys.

Mr. Clough Williams-Ellis, that vivacious architect and writer, who still plays so active and practical a part in the preservation of England and his Wales, once wrote a book which he wanted to call "Going, Going, Gone;" but the publishers, perhaps unwisely, preferred the alternative, *The Octopus*. He feared that England was doomed by the influence of the motor car, by bungaloid growth and "ribbon development," that the hammer would fall. My faith is that his colleagues and he on the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and the National Trust are in sight of the triumph of the counter-revolution.

The writers about rural England continue to be true to tradition. Gilbert White must remain supreme, partly because he was a pioneer, and W. H. Hudson, whose inspiration was born in the Argentine, had an eye and an ear and an insight and a sense of simple rhythm that will be hardly excelled. But writers of the present, or near-present, are in apostolic succession. Fraser Darling and Arthur Thompson, have a Darwinian background of knowledge and write as well as Huxley or his learned descendant Julian Huxley. An entirely new fount of knowledge about birds and their ways was opened by Eliot Howard in his *Introduction to the Study of Bird Behaviour*, and later books discover a mystic delight not unlike Jefferies in power and much superior in expression. To my taste no poet has interpreted the voice and the beauty of a bird in such moving verse as Ralph Hodgson.

Both Mr. Rose and Mr. Massingham are so fond of the past that they seem sometimes almost to despair of the future; but they too produce books that deserve a long life and are no mean successors to a great tradition.

Yes, we have good grounds for hope, in spite of all, that it may yet be truer of Britain than of Rome: *Merses profundo pulchrior evenit*. "This England" shall still deserve that incomparable epithet.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



### Building a Cottage



*Never met I a man engaged in the so simple operation of building his own house.*

THOREAU

IN the future of England much hope lies in the decentralisation of industries; and to this movement I have paid due tribute elsewhere; but the particular form of country life that retirement from London seemed to offer was completely shattered by one of these new decentralised factories. A Nottinghamshire firm bought a large and glorious tithe barn that abutted into the garden of my fifteenth-century house. One old man in the village remembered days when the barn was full of corn and a heavy horse was trained to tread it over for closer packing. My house had been inhabited by a Scottish farmer of precise and conscientious character. Just below the house were a few acres of lammias or half-year land, that is land which belonged to the local community for the winter six months and to the farmer for the summer. On the exact days of February and August this punctilious Scotsman would proceed to the entrance gate and open it or lock it, as custom prescribed; but he was an engrooved Sabbatarian, and if the date fell on a Sunday he would wait up till midnight struck to perform this ceremonial function. The one permanent record of his dwelling in the house was one curious corner window which he had made in order that he might pay his men without letting them into the house. The site was charming and I had the run of some three hundred acres for walking, or shooting with the spaniel that we always kept. The winding Lea, that "oft doth lose its way" bounded one side and was a perpetual pleasure. Duck and snipe, as well as kingfisher and dabchick, frequented it; and moorhen were innumerable.

Into such a rural paradise the manufacturer descended and began to manufacture singularly evil odours, as if that was his principal object. Evil emanations affected even plants in the garden. What was to be done? You may secure an injunction—though it is a singularly costly operation—against any smell that is injurious to health, but the law, which has no use for psychology, is unwilling to allow that smells which destroy pleasure are therefore bad for health. Then again, you cannot get an

injunction against smells in general. There must be an injunction against each particular smell. In any case an appeal to the law is not to be lightly undertaken. Folk in the village, the very beautiful village, were only less worried than we were; and strong protests were made. Finally the manufacturer, who was anxious to get on well with his neighbours, offered to buy the house; and regretfully the offer was accepted. A sad farewell was taken of the Lea and the garden rich with river silt and the old house. Would it be necessary to say farewell also to the friends and neighbours?

We had owned successively two old houses, the first, an Elizabethan cottage to which a succession of owners had added rooms and bits of rooms. It was like an untidy comb with cells stuck on eccentrically. The biggest and best room was much lower in one part than the other because this was built after an overhanging upper room, and to make sufficient clearance the floor had been excavated. The garden was nearly as odd. One urban-minded owner was told, when she desired to sell, that a lawn tennis court would add greatly to the value. So she enquired as to the dimensions of such a court and constructed it with a steep bank down at one end and up at the other. The foot of the upper bank and the top of the precipice were exactly and to an inch seventy-six feet apart. Foot faults were compulsory. It was called "The Old Cottage." The editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, for which at one time I did a good deal of work, said to me one day that it was the most pleasant address on their books!

Well, an old house, however "ill-convenient," as an old servant used to say, is a pleasant possession, but not everyone agrees. I remember Lady Scott, later Lady Hilton Young, saying to me, when she came to stay in the neighbourhood, that her choice would be a house new in every particular. The idea was worth considering, and presently a kind neighbour allowed me to buy a few acres alongside a most lovely common lying exactly half way between the two old houses we had vacated. The common, so coloured and spacious is it that it gives the feeling of living by the sea, had this extra advantage that no other building was possible to interrupt the view.

Many houses, especially when built by the antique, are "follies"; but there is no doubt that building a house and garden is a most satisfying amusement; and the experience may have some value for those who commit a like folly. The only estate agent I ever met who showed any imagination had the idea of making the gardens first, and then telling the builders that they must so design the house that the kitchen door was near the herb garden and the chief sitting-room opposite a lawn

or avenue or particular view; and the architects agreed that they found this harnessing a help not a hindrance. Disregard of the nature of the site is of course fatal, but some of the best and most famous are guilty of it. For example, the first design of Canberra, the new capital of Australia, which was to put an end to the long-standing jealousy between Melbourne and Sydney, would have entailed embankments and cuttings suggestive of a railway. The advantages of that pleasant hill and its wide prospects would have been in some sort sacrificed.

That thoughtful naturalist and fine writer, Anthony Collett, whom I knew first as a boy at Bradfield and afterwards when he joined *The Times*, planned to retire to a small house on Bucklebury Common in Berkshire. So he bought a site and planted trees. He did not, to the great grief of many friends, live to enjoy his forethought, but he sucked the deepest satisfaction from one interview with the labourer whom he had engaged to plant the trees; and the old man's excuse for altering the orders given him seemed to Collett, as to me, a perfect example of the truth of the rural mind. When Collett went down to see the planted orchard the Berkshire labourer met him and explained, not apologetically but as one countryman to another, "You did tell me," he said, "to plant the apple trees there; but I have put the walnut trees here and the apple trees there; for I did think that when you and me were gone those walnuts would shade them apples." That is the happy countryman all over. He takes the long view in which his own particular interests have no concern. He looks at things, though you could not explain the phrase to him, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

It is not necessary to make the garden before you make the house, but it is necessary to plan it first. A house is begun by clearing the surface of the ground and digging trenches. The architect's specification begins on this theme. The first class of workmen to be addressed is "excavator and concreter," and the first words are "Remove the vegetable earth," and it is ordered that "all excavations are to be deposited and levelled where directed on the site and the vegetable soil spread over on completion."

That profound phrase "vegetable earth" was one of a number in the specification that seemed to me full of the stuff of literature, and what good husbandry is to the credit of the architect who insists on topsoil remaining on top!

The amount of soil so removed is immense and the first duty of the home-maker is to decide what is to be done with it. I decided that it should make a high and broad bank defending the lawn and flower-beds from the west wind and hiding the rose garden behind it. House and

garden would have lost half their value without that bank and owing to the mixture of soil shrubs grew on it like weeds; and, within a few years, birds were nesting among the cotoneasters, box, diplopappus, hypericum, senna, guelder, holly, rhus, rue, rose and the rest. A bare, flat site, beautiful chiefly for the width of its views and the foreground of gracious common, found its secret place and its covert.

The specification, in spite of its ugly name, taught us a number of new words and processes. Indeed it remains a satisfying document; but what I liked best about it was its almost Old Testament savour. It was an essentially moral document, insisting everywhere on good work: "The bricks are to be good, hard, well burnt wirecuts free from lime or other blemishes." What does Moses say? "Whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you." But the likeness depends not on any incidental word or phrase but on the pervading belief in perfection. The sand is to be "clean and sharp pit sand." The steps into the house are "not to be screeded for a finish," "As the walls mount"—a good phrase—"the cavity is to be kept thoroughly clean and is to be filled with a waterproof cement well *tamped* into the hollow." "Lay to all walls, sleeper walls, chimney breasts a damp-proof course formed with two courses of stout Welsh slates well lapped and bedded in cement." "Chimney stack to be formed with grey bricks and redder bricks for the angles." "Tiles are to be well burned local hand-made sand-faced plain tiles. They are to have a good camber in both directions. No twisted tiles are to be used. The colour must be that of the natural clay and the roof, when finished, is to have the varied texture of an old roof. Tiles are to be sought for this purpose." "Hips are to be bonnet-shaped." "The timber to be used is to be imported sound redwood of suitable building quality. All to be well-seasoned and free from an excess of *wane*, discoloured sapwood, dead knots, cracks or other blemishes." "All joinery is to be knotted and primed before leaving the joiner's shop." "All framing, is to be put together with well-fitting mortices and tenon joints wedged up solid." "Lay the floor of drawing-room with selected jarrah." "Put scotias inside and outside all doorframes." "Stairs are to be formed in the solid with treads and *riser* of triangular section with seasoned oak specially dried." "The ironmongery is to be of the best quality." "Plastering: render, float and set to all walls." "Make good after all other trades and leave the plasterers' work perfect." "All lead is to be of the best new metal properly milled, free from flaws and of the full weight." "All glazing is to be best quality—well and properly bedded, sprigged and back puttied." Finally and triumphantly: "Clean down the external faces of buildings, wash off stains, clean tiles and tiled

cills, scrub pavings and floors, clear away any rubbish and leave all parts of the premises clean and perfect at the completion of the work."

I must confess that the document gave me the sort of pleasure you may detect in the account of Solomon's Temple, or Caesar's Bridge. It would all go into Old Testament prose or even Greek and Latin hexameters. Doubtless a good part is common form, but this owed a certain flourish to proper pride of art in Mr. Thomas Rayson, our Oxford-based architect.

In spite of the emphasis on perfection the house was singularly cheap. The least artistic of the men engaged, themselves enjoyed the emphasis on perfection. The builder, a local man who started at the very bottom, said to me when the building was complete: "My men say they enjoyed doing some *good* work." They had, perforce, been largely engaged in work that had to be done at full speed, and at the sacrifice of "the little more."

As its antiquity gives a permanent daily pleasure to the owner of an Elizabethan house, so the knowledge of the good work put into the new house remains an abiding satisfaction. The twenty-one pages of the specification are a treasured book; and their savour does not grow stale. My daughter, who was living at the time in an Oxfordshire cottage, said she liked it because "there was plenty of place for the moon"; and indeed one of the advantages of living on high land rather than a valley is the wider view of sky as well as earth. Compensations for the lost Lea are many. A very beautiful English common where all the world has "the right of air and exercise," and the villagers the right of estovers among other rights, spreads in the foreground. It is decorated with ling and gorse, thyme, hairbell, bedstraw, juniper, raspberry and wild cherry; and not least important it is clothed with fine grasses, among which the sheeps' fescue prevails. This, above the rest, gives the soft and springy tread that makes any walk on the common a delight; and of course charms all golf-players who putt on the greens. The view extends through and over innumerable trees for ten or twelve miles to the east, and to the west and south the hedgerows round fields of grass and tilth are tall and various. The true English scene is expressed at every direction; and what more could an onlooker want?

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN



# This England—and After



*I change, but I cannot die.*

The Cloud    SHELLEY

*For here lay the excellent wisdom of him that built Mansoul, that the walls  
could never be broken down nor hurt by the most mighty adverse potentate,  
unless the townsman gave consent thereto.*

Holy War    BUNYAN

**I**N the middle of the present war I was asked to join a committee whose task it was to advise the central planning committee, on sanctuaries and reservations and conservations. The committee, which concerned itself only with the natural history of one county, Hertfordshire, was of no great account, but it helped to focus the acute problem of saving "this England." That "this" of Shakespeare's is perhaps the most affectionate attribute in literature; and all countrymen fear lest this England may become that England. It happened that two friends of mine felt themselves to be in some sort protagonists of contradictory views. Sir Daniel Hall, who had distinguished himself as a chemist at Balliol, became Director of Rothamsted, the oldest agricultural station in the world, and leaving that was adopted as a civil servant in the last war. On the eve of the present war he published a book that was designed to give the Government a policy in its planning scheme. The gist of it is a plea for the large-scale, mechanised factory farm. His views affected Mr. Massingham, no farmer, but perhaps the best of all present writers on rural England, with a sort of passionate disgust. Almost every week since the publication of Hall's book (which found very strong support, even in Oxford) Mr. Massingham has written an angry article or two, almost every week on the theme of the Merrie England that is being progressively destroyed. His ideal is local self-sufficiency, maintained by local crafts, local mills, local building, local feeding, and, not least, local character. What he has written in regard to the Cotswolds and Chilterns, Henry Williamson has written of Devon and Miss Rider Haggard of East Anglia. Between these schools of thought who shall arbitrate?



Yet arbitration between these faiths is a great necessity. What is it that makes our England like no other place and, in the eyes of the engrooved countryman, supreme? Physically the hedgerows, the scattered trees about homesteads and country houses, the grouped villages and the quick variety of natural scenery. Socially the village houses focussed about the churches are expressive in their very form of a social life various as the scene, but, consenting to a mutual relation, undisturbed by jealousy between richer and poorer. In my old village "the squire" and the parson were beyond all question the most popular characters: they were felt to be friends of the poor, and the more they flourished the more even the very poorest were pleased. Their children, as I have recorded, were called "our children" by the village, as loyal subjects speak of our King. There is nothing feudal or subservient in this. It is a form, perhaps the best form, of Communism, shed of its bookish definitions.

Now the England of the future cannot be created by our imitation of the past; but what was best in the past came into being through obedience to natural conditions. Geographically, climatically and, therefore, socially, England is a local country. The coloured counties have created stock that fit their native herbage and soil. Hereford cattle fatten most quickly on Hereford pastures; and Southdown sheep on the chalk uplands and Romney Marsh on levels given by the sea. The villages are lovelier than other villages in part because they seem to have grown out of the soil, like native trees. Cotswold stone has been used for Cotswold roofs, as straw from the next farm for Huntingdon cottages or reeds from the nearest marsh for Norfolk thatch. The village green is as natural as the *tapis vert* of French landscape gardeners is often artificial. Windmills and watermills were built all over England to thresh the neighbouring corn crops; and the millers would even consent to keep separate the gleanings for particular cottagers. Time was when almost all the food was locally grown; and even the poorer cottager collected much of his own grain by gleaning and feasted on his own pork. The village grouped round the church was conscious, was proud of its physical and spiritual unity. What was best in each village was its self-sufficiency in food, in crafts and in much beside.

It would be untrue to hold that everything was ideal, for poverty was intense, and it would be false to true progress to try to restore the old narrowness, now that transport of material and ideas make the whole world kin, and dependence on distant lands is a necessity of life, indeed an addition to it. Nevertheless, in development from the past, not divorce from it, lies the hope of a new Merrie England. The abolition of the local

mills and the building of vast mills at the ports have done nothing but harm. The feeding of the country people from central markets and by imported tins has ruined the health of consumers and brought loss to the producers. Trace a single cabbage. It is grown at Sandy, forty miles to the north of London. By cart and train it is conveyed, by the agency of at least four lots of hands, to Covent Garden. It is bought there by a greengrocer in Newbury, fifty miles to the west of London, suffering the same rough and costly transferences in this second passage as in the first. It has become a battered and flaccid and even ill-smelling lump by the time it reaches the kitchen of some Berkshire home; and half its qualities as food is clean destroyed. The expert and hardworking market-gardener who grew it may receive from Covent Garden, if his cabbage is not out of season, a bill from the railway and the distributor which may cancel or more than cancel the worth of the produce. This system, which prevails widely, is senseless and un-English, is even suicidal. To avert or at least arrest such a course of folly is one of the first necessities for the England of tomorrow.

Now, when the garden cities were started on the inspiration of that most simple, modest and by no means clever founder, Ebenezer Howard, whom to know was a liberal education, an essential part of the idea was the foundation of an agricultural belt, which would feed the city with fresh and therefore wholesome food. The ideal was not attained. Perhaps it was too carelessly or selfishly overthrown; but a great many local attempts, mostly undertaken by women, as at East Grinstead, have been set afoot to build up a system of local markets and to induce local growers to supply their own neighbours. The humble but most effective Women's Institutes are winning small successes in this direction all over England; and the war greatly promoted the movement. Even those local mills that survived came again into full activity, milled grain for the local poultry-keepers and kept the offal of the grain within the village.

The signs are that a number of small industries, helped by the presence of electric power, will transfer themselves to the villages. There are two such in the beautiful village best known to me. Even a factory for explosives is concealed within the native loveliness of a small Hampshire village. Among village craftsmen, blacksmiths at any rate, are finding enough local work to fill their time in the production of tools and works of art, over above their routine jobs. Though some villages waste away, many become larger, livelier and more important. The need is all the greater to prevent them becoming tin cans tied to urban tails and to keep their setting lovely and unsullied.

There is hope, too, for the wilting hamlets. Most of them are situated

on heavy clay soils. Now clay is in one aspect the richest of all soils. In the Fens they dig it up to spread on the surface and so double the fertility of the land. It can grow wheat or beans that would make the mouth water of the most successful wheat-grower in the Prairie Provinces. They are one of the greatest of the world's granaries, but their yield per acre is not half the English yield. Nevertheless we have so organised things that farmers four thousand miles away can more easily and cheaply transport their grain to English mills than even the closest neighbours. Farmers losing heart, landowners losing money have allowed the clay to turn enemy and play the part of the thorns and briars in Eden. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the villages have waned for lack of drains on the farms. Under a natural policy for husbandry the least considerable hamlet would recover health. Indeed, already on the strength of vague promises the land begins to recover value. The recovery can be assured, if love of England includes love of its soil. One of the troubles is that most of our planners of rural England are architects, whose minds are more concerned with pretty cottages and open towns than with comely crops. Our villages grew into beauty from home influences. They are supremely lovely not because artists designed them, but because the folk tilled the land and quarried the stone and cut the oak and worshipped in the church with knowledge and gusto. "God speed the plough" was their fervent and effectual prayer. Progress in transport, in communication, in the whole standard of our life, now demands central help and organisation; but its end should be to enhance, not supplant, local endeavour and pride. Better farming means bigger villages, and in them may come into being scattered industries and busier crafts. Beauty will grow almost of itself for beauty must be live, not static.

When English civilisation began to emerge its chief struggle was against the grim and dark forests that covered the land, even at one time in the Fens and on the chalk uplands; but our wise forefathers did not utterly destroy; and specimens from the forests, remaining in true apostolic succession, still suggest to a visitor the neighbourhood of a forest today. England has no forest, though many districts are named forest, which after all means merely an out-of-door place; but in the English way we have kept in touch with the past. You cannot think of England without thinking of its trees, bosoming churches and homesteads, breaking the line of the little trees that make the hedgerows, grouped in groves and copses and gorses and little woods, protecting cattle in the parks.

There is something almost human about a tree, as there is something

almost anti-human in a close-knit forest, where no birds sing. W. H. Hudson, who is supreme interpreter of some aspects of nature, confessed to be among the company of tree-worshippers and had great arguments on the subject with his biographer Mr. Morley Roberts. I doubt whether any passage in Thomas Hardy has stayed more fondly in the memory of English readers than the account of the planting of trees and the sound of their voices in the wind. What wealth of use lay in these single trees utterly surprised our statesmen and organisers in both wars. We were discovered to be almost self-sufficing in hard woods; and, even so, hardly any use was made—as it might have been made—of the multitudinous elms. These oaks and beeches which supplied the nation's need were growing on private lands, some in little woods, some in belts, some along hedgerows. They belonged to private landowners who had grown trees to their own taste or allowed the trees to grow as they would; and no tree so certainly, so widely, sow themselves as English oaks. "Hearts of Oak" is no superficial phrase. The trees, like the crafts, are local. They did not come from formal plantings by a government or a special commission.

When the great oaks fell and lay like dead bodies on a battlefield, the sight was hard to bear. We knew how much the sight had meant to us. By my own boyhood home there stood an immense ash (a species of tree especially dear to that invincible countryman, William Cobbett) at the edge of the glebe and on the bank of the brook. We could see it, we could not help seeing it, from the east-looking windows. A day came when the squire's agent decided, and quite rightly, to make some money out of trees on the property. The victims were marked by a slice of the woodman's axe. When this tree was so touched, we all felt that a bit of home would depart with the familiar form, familiar at all seasons of the year, not least in winter, when the final uplift of the drooping branches became a symbol of revived hope. So we fought for its life. My father sent an earnest request to the agent; and though agents are often credited with a lack of soul, this one consented to spare the tree.

It was indeed difficult to refuse a request from my father, as a previous agent (who certainly had small apparent soul) discovered. The incident may, perhaps be fruitfully told on behalf of a wide tolerance. The agent came to the rectory to report that he must turn a certain labourer out of his cottage, on the ground that a child had been born to his young wife three weeks after marriage. It may be—for the two were unsympathetic—that he wished to accuse my father of having married such a pair. My father took the agent into his study and requested him to sit down and listen. The agent was of an urban type and not famous for

his moral code. He could not be quite directly charged with his own aberrations; but he could be made to realise them. The sermon took this course: "How many of your friends, Mr. Butt, go up to town for purposes into which I will not enter; and I have never heard that you even think worse of them. These labourers fall in love and keep company and because of their stronger feelings have even less to say than usual. Is it to be wondered at that when two of them sit together tongue-tied in a secret place that they should anticipate the wedding ceremony? Do you really hold that this man, famous in the village both for his physical powers and his reticence, is a worse man than these friends of yours? If you suggest turning this man out of his cottage, I shall appeal to the squire. Such a thing shall not be done while I am rector of this parish." There was no reply. A very flaccid agent got up and left the house.

Little tussles of various sorts were not uncommon. One day on the demand of a farmer, an admirable tenant, the agent proposed to forbid a labourer from putting up a pigsty by his cottage garden. The farmer, fine fellow though he was, hated to see independence in any of his labourers, and naturally enough, since good tenants were hard to get in those days of depression, the agent was loath to give any offence. His excuse was that the pigsty would be too near the house. "In that case you had better give him a little bit of the field. It is rough grass and of no particular value." So it came about that the cottage garden was enlarged and the labourer enriched by a pig and a pigsty.

How many memories fly back to perch, even to roost, on the trees about our homes! but the use of trees is another question. When the last war ended in 1918, the Government set up almost at once a permanent Forestry Commission, which now has its forests and chases on else bare hills and wastes of sand and warren. Time was when these woods had a narrow significance. That only was a forest where kings hunted, and that only a chase where nobles had a like privilege. Today Thetford Chase is not only a national reserve of timber, it has supported a colony of smallholders and brought into being new hamlets. Nevertheless, the Forestry Commission, much abused in many localities, has neglected an invaluable English quality. By a mistaken and growing emphasis on one part only of its terms of reference it has quite neglected the chief supply of trees, those scattered trees, seen in their rich beauty and in their war-time use in every shire, in every parish in this England. Thetford Chase, which is the best example of the new afforestation, consists largely of Scotch and Corsican pine, though the original formula was "every fourth tree deciduous." The regimented firs, however valuable, indeed necessary, are not a substitute of oak and ash and beech, birch and wych elm, and

perhaps, in deference to the shade of Cobbett, acacia or locust tree. Under the stress of war we have felled the scattered oaks and the rest; and if England is to keep its ancient glory, we must see to it that such trees are replaced; and now that properties change hands at short intervals, now that the reserve wealth of landowners is exhausted, conscientious replanting will be neglected unless help and encouragement and leadership are supplied.

That will happen to the woods, spinneys, belts and park-like trees which has happened to the old apple and pear orchards of Hereford and many another shire. The apple takes at least ten years to come into bearing and it has been said of pears, which grow into magnificent trees, that men plant them only for their successors. Landlords, not overwhelmed with money and conscious of changes in ownership, were unwilling to undertake the altruistic job of planting new trees for every old tree. The tenants were of much the same mind; and so the orchards decayed and vanished. Two friends of mine, one a cider-maker of imagination, and one a great man of science, in literally fruitful co-operation, made a census over a long course of years of the orchard trees of "The Three Counties"—Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester—and found no more than a single specimen of several sorts of both apple and pear. Some had clean vanished, including that wonderful apple, rustically known in the past as "the bloody Turk." They took steps to revive orchards, but obviously the work was too extensive for private operation.

The wealth and beauty of England are far-flung. They are found about every field and paddock and park. No forest or chase is a substitute, though it may be a useful appendage. In respect of trees, too, as in most other affairs, regulation must be in some measure parochial as well as general. England is to be zoned and belted and planned and dedicated, and even "sterilised," a word of the worst omen. The planners, led by that eager, earnest and ingenious Professor of Civics at University College, London, who has a touch of the poetry associated with the name Abercrombie, began to enjoy an anticipatory vogue even during the stress of war. Now the very first considerable essay, anticipating the war by a number of years, was in and about the New Kent coalfield, when he co-operated with Lord Milner, a greater countryman than those familiar with his scholarship and statesmanship at all realise. All those concerned with this survey and this endeavour to save Kent from the worse evils of the industrial revolution, felt that their chief difficulty was in persuading local councils to agree to a common scheme. In this case the outlook was too local, and England has suffered from the defect of its virtues as well as the conspiracy to destroy those virtues. Similarly it seemed to me that

in the committees on which I served to make suggestions to the planners, the tendency was to look at the problem in too small details. It is true that many plants, such as the Cheddar pink and the daphne and the lily of the valley, find their optimum here and there in narrow circles. There are varieties or sub-species of mammals that exist on small islands. Even some of the birds and butterflies, in spite of their conquest of space, seem to find these optimum of conditions, only on narrow and peculiar spots, such as Breckland or particular Broads or patches of shingle; but, in spite of a few exceptions, when we come to the preservation of plants, insects, mammals, fishes and birds, the preservers must consider types of country. By far the most important home of wild life—for plants also live—is the river valley and the coast. If these are kept free from ugly things and things that hamper accessibility, little sanctuaries and partial preserves will look after themselves. Almost automatically, that is by the natural compulsion of lovers of our land, the National Trust is coming to own or control more and more of the more sacred parts of the country. Historic houses, such as Lord Desborough's and Lord Astor's on the cliffs of the Thames, are "dedicated in perpetuity." They, like the more thorough possessions, are safe. A friend of mine desires to leave to the Trust a marvellous narrow valley in Devon, where buzzard and raven nest and the buildings are eloquent of the past. Such gifts, as this prospective gift of his, seem likely to continue and multiply. The National Trust is becoming a larger landowner than the dukes, though its possessions will be rather an archipelago than continental. Individual bodies, of which the best is the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust, own and control marshes and broads and spits and headlands peculiarly precious to naturalists. Let the planners look to the rivers and keep them pure in substance and as free from ugly accretions as from poisonous in-flows. The National Park of Great Britain, vastly more important than any other to the people, is the seacoast; yet while the creation of national parks is discussed with much parade and much ignorance we have not a word of the ugly barriers set up to deny the coast and offend the eye.

The National Park is not really an English concern, though it may be of some moment to Wales and Scotland, where wilder, emptier hills and moors are found. Snowdonia and the Cairngorms stand out. The subject has been coloured by such glorious examples as Banff in the Canadian Rockies, as Yellowstone Park in the United States and Kruger's Park in South Africa. My old Oxford tutor used to say, "Analogy is no argument, though it may suggest that an argument exists"—a profound sentiment. We cannot rival, we should be foolish to mimic, these immense parks overseas; but there is a pleasant sound about a National

Park, and it would be possible, as at Banff, where bears almost feed out of your hand, though difficult, to associate public accessibility with preservation. The tripper is a dangerous denizen of any sanctuary. Two or three such parks, with a core kept as a sanctuary, would be attractive and are well worth the expert study of the planners; but they are a detail, not to be compared in worth with the preservation of the sanctity of those features that make all the world fall in love with the face of England. Save the villages, now being strung out as painfully as a shapely body on the rack, till the heart can no more pump blood to the extremities. Save the brooks and rivers, polluted by the effluent of factories and defaced by the erection of unworthy buildings. Save the sea, fouled by oil, and the beaches prohibited to the public, and the hinterland of the beaches plague-spotted by shacks and, as Carlyle used to say, other "concrete mendacities."

England, as the phrase goes, is a humanised scene; it is like the town, man-made. Man destroyed the grim and dangerous forests, built villages and homesteads, and fenced fields. When all is said, inland the chief necessity is not the half-negative work of preservation, but the direction of the new humanisation. Let farming be made in reality the first industry, in popular affection as in economic fact. If flourishing farms are encircled by a "silver girdle" untarnished by foul essences, all will be well with the England that is to be. It will in most other regards preserve itself. Let the planners look to the towns, which need not negative preservation, but reconstruction. What countrymen fear is the grim experiment in homoeopathy by which the planners propose to cure the evils of the towns by urbanising the country.

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